

# CHESTER — LE — CUSTREET *and district*

*The people and the place*



# CHESTER-LE-STREET LOOKING SOUTH PAST AND PRESENT



## FOREWORD

The decision by Chester-le-Street District Council to commission a local history of the District and its people was taken early in 1992. The choice of researcher and author was a simple one. Local historian and writer Gavin Purdon is a resident of Chester-le-Street, and has produced a number of publications with a historical bias. His innovative approach, combined with assistance from local people and the District Council, has resulted in a history of Chester-le-Street which we hope will be a source of information and interest to both keen historians and amateur enthusiasts alike.



# CHESTER-LE-STREET

## AND DISTRICT

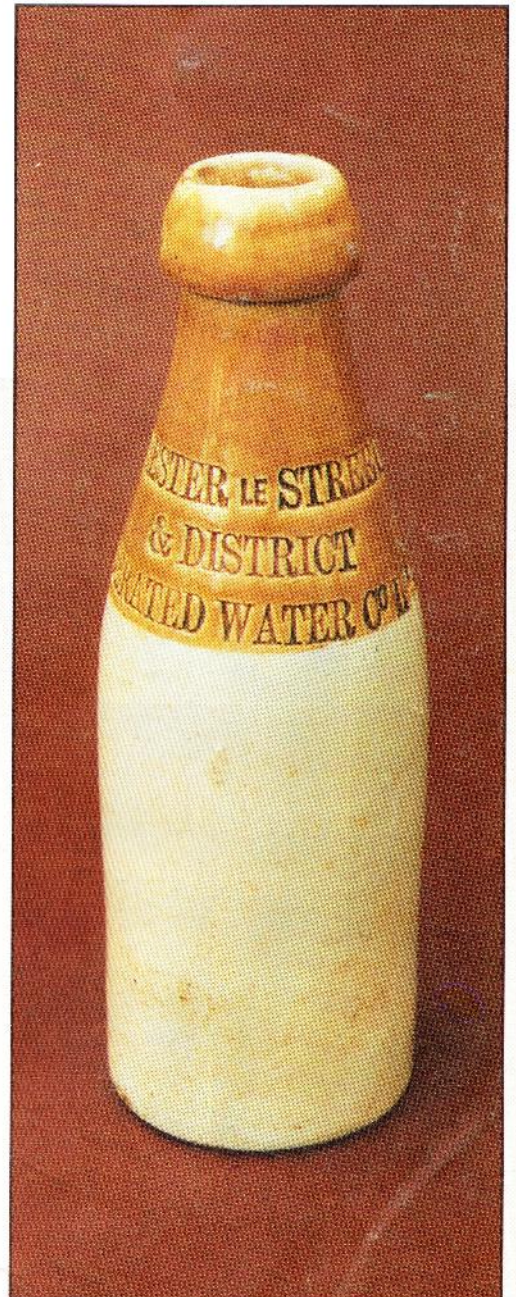
Someone without a knowledge of the place or its people might think "Chester-le-Street and District" a likely candidate for Least Interesting Book Title of the Year.

Inside the District that same title is guaranteed to catch the eye and spark off interest because the words "Chester-le-Street and District" run deep through local life like letters in a stick of candy rock.

Chester people picking up this book may not recall the pop bottles drunk from in childhood being stamped "Chester-le-Street and District". They might well have forgotten the little red books of picture postcards, "Views of Chester-le-Street and District" sent off to pen-friends years ago.

It's just local instinct to take an interest. Something celebrating Chester-le-Street and District will strike that kind of chord in much the same way as anything undermining the idea gets local hackles well and truly raised.

*From pop bottles to political structures, the notion of Chester-le-Street as a District has left its mark on countless aspects of local life.*





Chester-le-Street is no latter day creation that owes its existence to some enterprising Victorian Building Society. The first ever translation of the Bible into the English language was written in 10th Century Chester-le-Street, and it was a place whose people already had a venerable history when Aldred the Saxon monk put his quill pen to the priceless vellum of the Lindisfarne Gospels a thousand years ago.

The beauty of Chester-le-Street's countryside and the richness of its human history are nothing less than a treasure chest, although the likeness to an old Durham coal tub also springs to mind.

Like the coal tub that was so long its trade mark the District is squarish in shape, flat bottomed and steep sided, with a hole at each end to let the water in and out. Like an old coal tub it has been filled and filled again by countless different folk and shovel load upon shovel load of history has heaped its bit of countryside high with tradition.

More than once the ancient treasures of Chester-le-Street District have been plundered, senselessly hacked apart or melted down and lost. Yet rarely since the Viking raids has the District's right to tend to its own affairs in its own ways been seriously threatened. Doing so would go against the grain of the land, the grain of history and the will of the people.

In a District like Chester-le-Street such matters stir strong feelings. The people are not backward looking inhabitants of some open air museum. The present and the future are very much in their thoughts, yet the community's sense of place and sense of the past are powerful forces to be reckoned with. Hopefully this booklet might help to explain why.

*Old street names such as Roman Avenue, Foundry Lane and Lindisfarne Avenue record the District's Classical, Christian and Industrial past. Bullion Lane suggests Chester-le-Street might quite literally have been a treasure chest and not without good reason.*

*In the 11th century a huge find of gold and silver was uncovered in the town centre and although history isn't supposed to repeat itself another treasure trove was ploughed up at Black Row Farm near Lumley in 1950. The casual backward glance of a tractor driver checking his furrow caught a glint in the soil behind. Walking back he came across "a big bird's nest lying in the soil" then what looked more like "a lot of old milk bottle tops".*

*Treasure trove was the last thing on his mind but that's what it was, getting on for a thousand coins of old hammered English silver packed in a deerskin bag from the reigns of Edward the Sixth, Philip and Mary, Queen Elizabeth and King James the First. It wasn't the first treasure trove found in Chester-le-Street District and it probably won't be the last.*



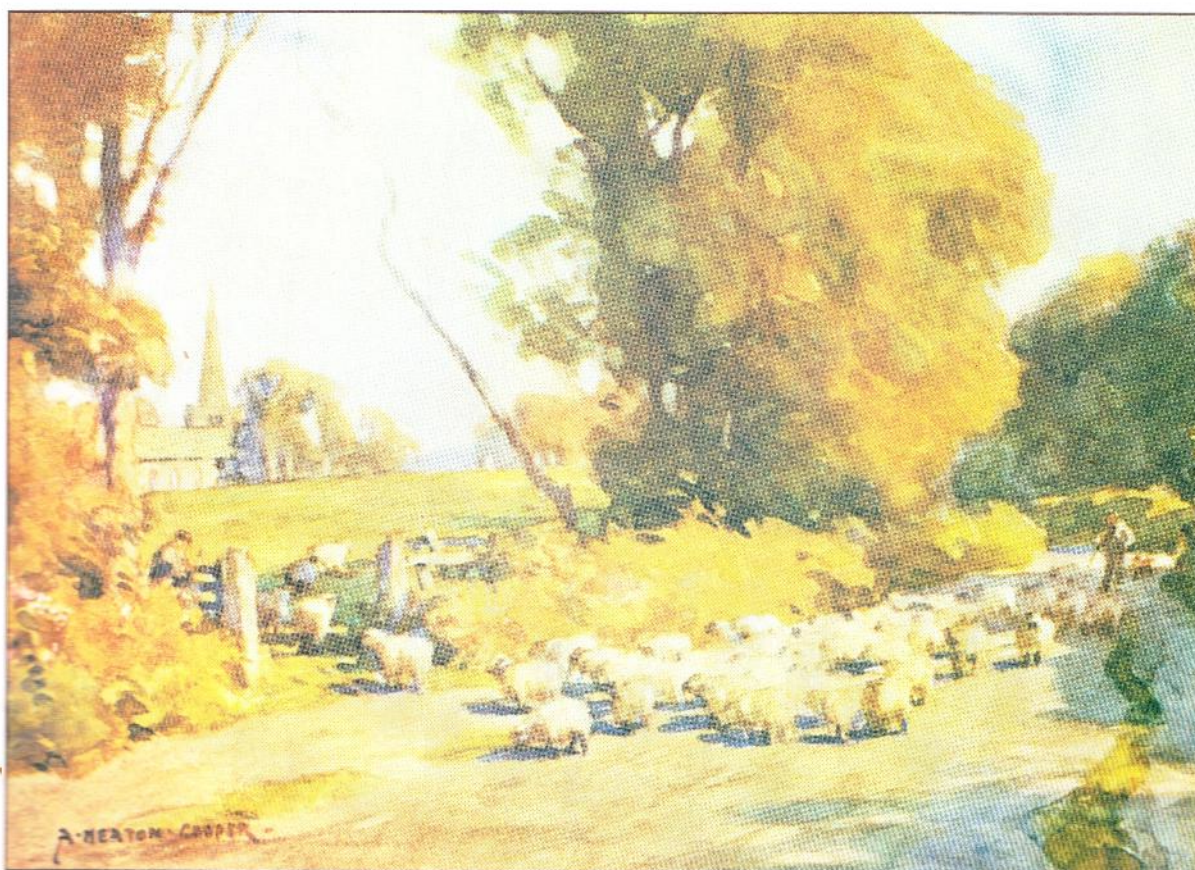
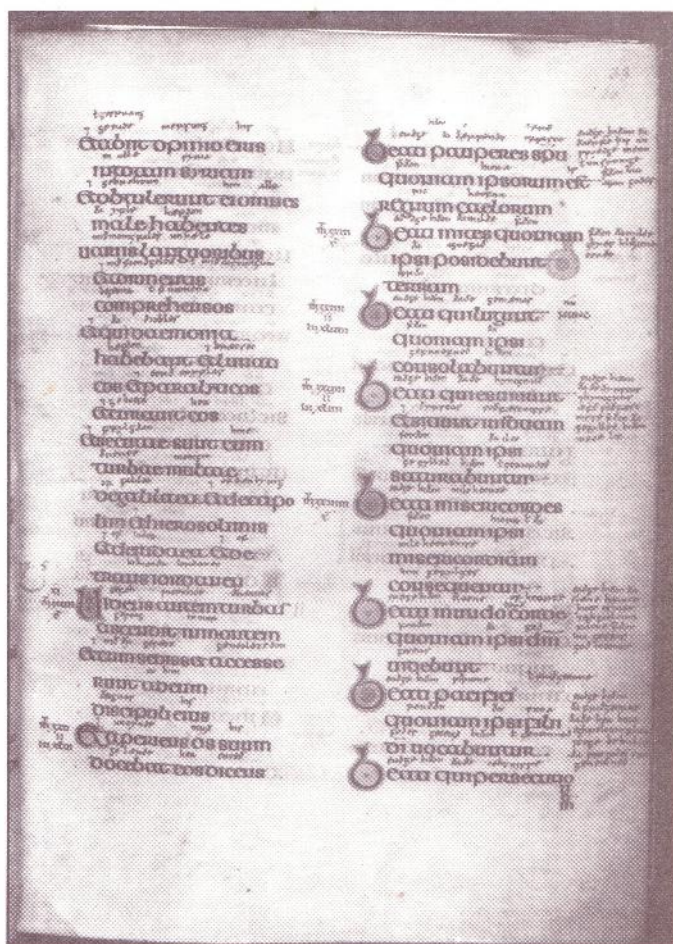
Actual coins from the Lumley Hoard buried during the troubled times of the English Civil War. They lay in a field near the local Brick Works for 300 years.

...AND  
NOTHING  
LESS.





From Monks' manuscripts to Miners' midgie lamps, Chester-le-Street District is a place with history by the tub load.



Pretty as a Picture. Times might have changed since Heaton Cooper painted his views of Chester-le-Street District but there is still much about the local countryside that would catch an artist's eye.



One of the oldest inhabitants of the Chester-le-Street District is the Horse Tail Fern. 250 million years ago it was a swamp dweller of the carboniferous everglades. Today this little plant is a common or garden weed. Without so much as a flower or scent to draw attention to itself, the Horse Tail grows unnoticed all over Chester-le-Street District, a living fossil from another age.

Some of the more exotic natives are no longer with us, such as the squid and cuttle fish that once swam in the warm shallow seas of the District 200 million years ago. If you look hard enough at the surrounding countryside today you can trace the ghost of their old hunting grounds. The high ground to the west around Waldrige and Sacriston was tropical coastland and the ridgeline lying east of Lumley and Bournmoor an offshore coral reef. The low lying basin of land where Chester-le-Street now stands between this ancient beach and barrier reef was the bed of the prehistoric Zechstein Sea that stretched from County Durham to Poland.

The rise and fall of this ancient sea's level piled new swamplands on top of old and laid down the local coal seams. The District inherited its mineral wealth from these tropical swamps but it owes its good looks to the more recent Ice Age.

A million years ago the glaciers gave the features of the far older landscape quite a facelift. The rubble barrier left by the Ice Cap at Chester-le-Street did nothing less than knock the River Wear right off its old course up the Team Valley to the Tyne and sent it out to sea at Sunderland instead.

One of the first modern inhabitants of the Chester-le-Street District to try to make sense of the landscape and how it came to be was Robert Greenwell, Master Coal Shaft Sinker in Lord Lambton's collieries.

During the Napoleonic Wars Robert Greenwell battled with quicksand cave-ins and the riddle of the rocks he was surrounded by. Clad in oil soaked fustians to keep out the wet and a leather cap to ward off falling rocks and water he plied his trade across the Chester-le-Street District.

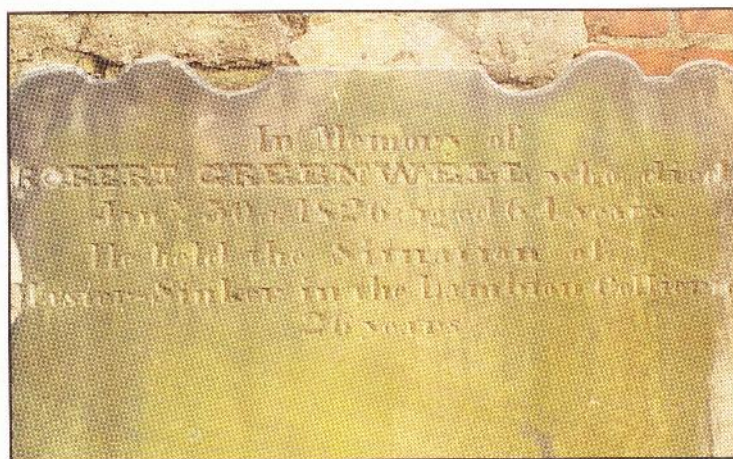
In those days fossils were still thought of as thunderbolts and devils' toenails and huge rocks were there because that's where a giant had thrown them down.

Robert Greenwell read the unwritten story of the rocks and tried to crack their code. Shafts were costly and quite a gamble, so he had to know what fossils belonged to which rocks, which rocks were found in what order. The success of the coal trade depended on it.

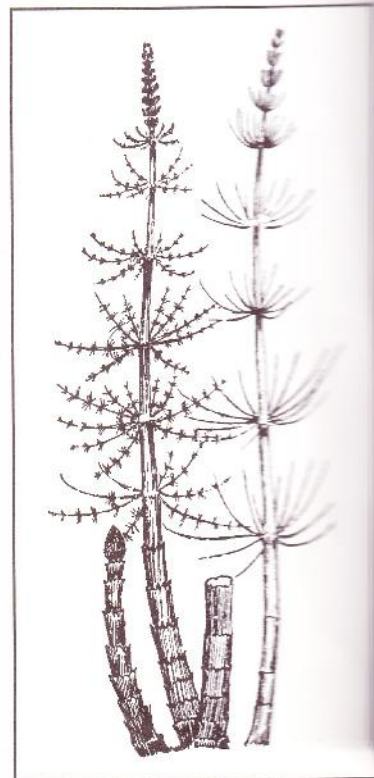
Driving a shaft too long or abandoning it too soon were equally disastrous. Knowing the rocks divided good risk from reckless gamble.

In the dim light of the shaft bottom he held the stone likeness of the cuttle fish in his hand, the perfect imprint of the horse tail fern too, and saw just how far down the glaciers had dug a million years before him.

Robert Greenwell had to tread the difficult path between the past and the present, between tradition and progress. He set his mind to gaining a better understanding of what had gone before, to be helped by the past and not weighed down by it.



*Carved from the North Durham sandstone he knew so well the graveyard monument of pioneer geologist and master miner Robert Greenwell still stands today in Chester-le-Street's Church Chare.*



*Horse Tail Ferns, sketched by a mining engineer from their imprint left on a coal seam rock millions of years old. The same fern species still grows wild around Chester-le-Street District.*

... AND HORSE  
TAIL FERNS.  
FRAGMENTS FROM  
CHESTER-LE-STREET'S  
PREHISTORIC PAST.



million  
it is a  
e Horse

that once  
h at the  
n  
lying  
ster-le-

down  
it owes

t. The  
Year  
stead.  
of the  
mbton's

riddle of  
r cap to

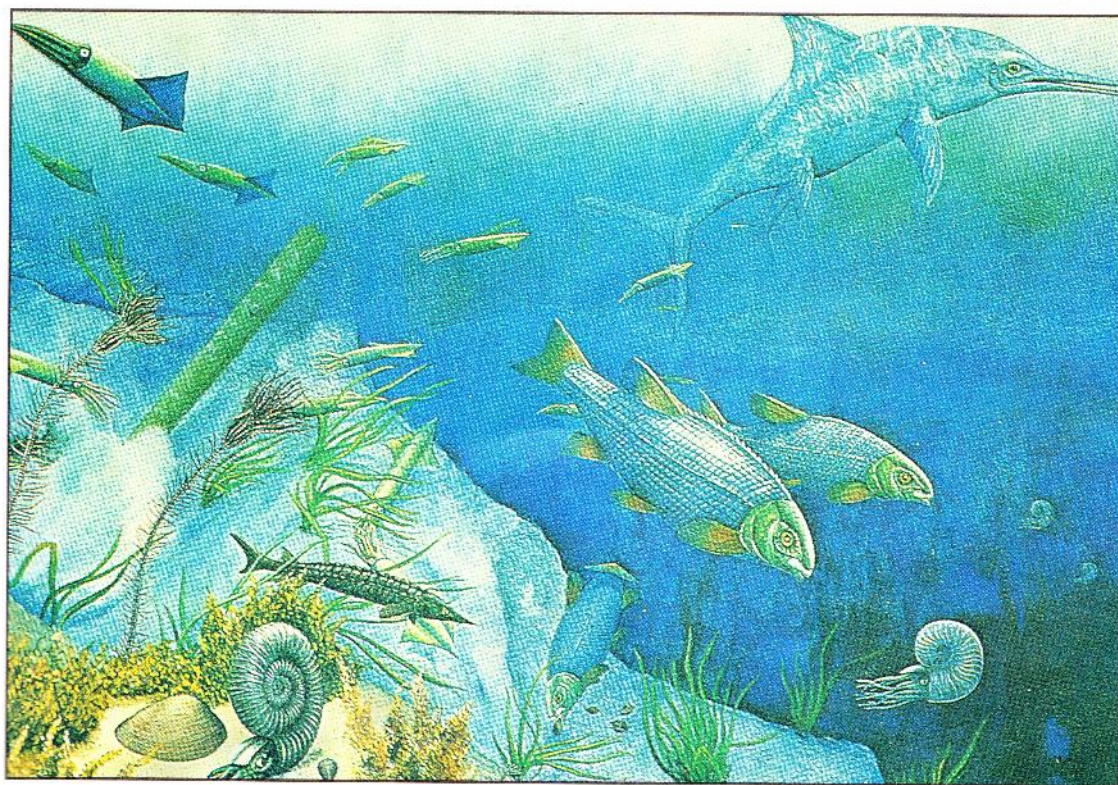
ocks

fts were  
ocks

e rocks

nd, the  
illion

en  
before, to





# HILL FOLK

...AND  
HORSE  
PEOPLE.  
THE FIRST  
SETTLERS  
ARRIVE.

The glaciers were slow to loose their grip on Stone Age Chester-le-Street. The landscape first left by the Ice Cap was cold, bare and bulldozed. Only the toughest plants and hardiest of creatures found a foothold there.

A few Old Stone Age nomads explored the District, losing the odd flint arrowhead along the way, but with very little to hunt or gather they came in no great numbers.

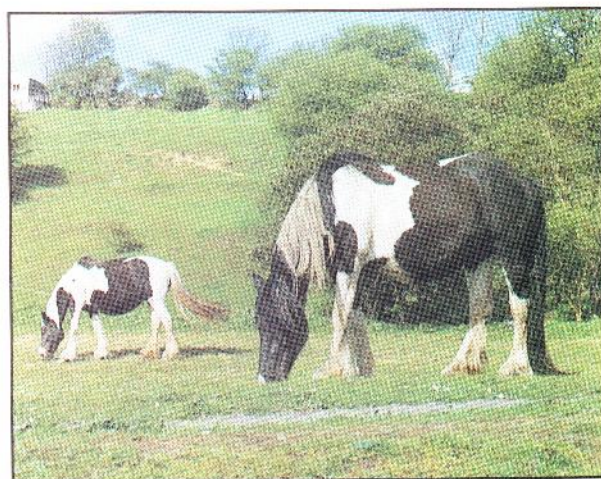
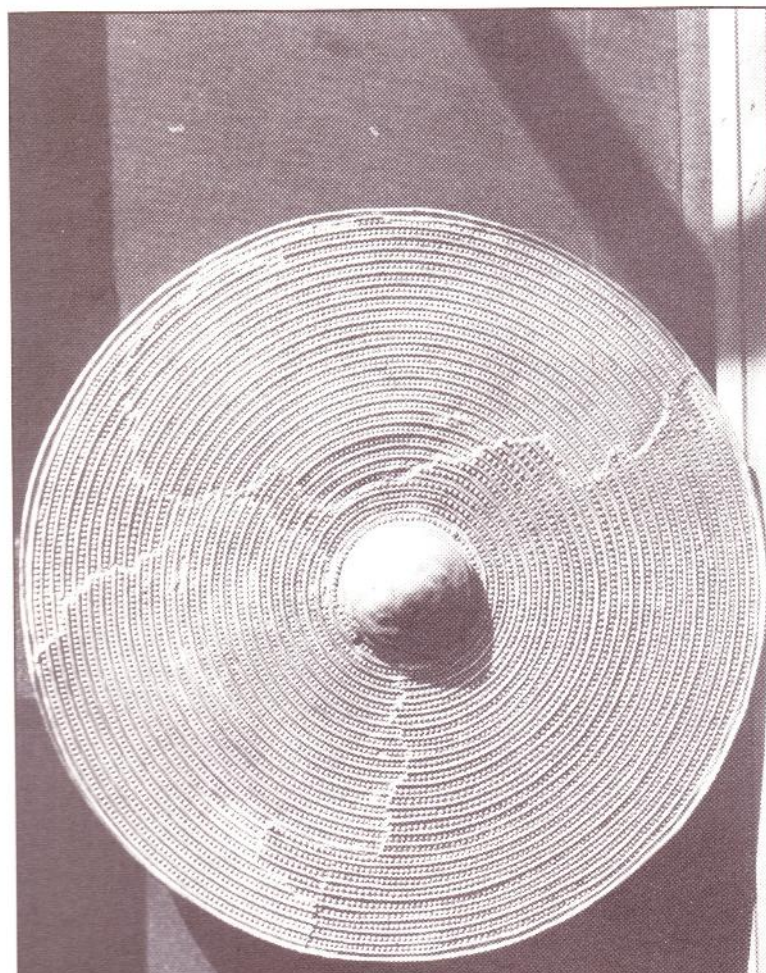
The New Stone Age was a warmer time. Juniper bushes, birch trees and pines colonised the area but it was really in the Bronze and Iron Ages that people began to make their mark on Chester-le-Street District.

Iron Age settlers left a grave at Sacriston. The oldest known human inhabitant of the District was found there huddled in the small, carefully made coffin of rough stone slabs, built by the Beake People of 2,000 BC. One of their yellowy-grey clay pots lay beside the bones, the criss cross pattern on it pressed in by a piece of string when the clay was wet still as fresh and as sharp as the day the beaker was fired by its potter.

Not far to the north of the grave site a fine and important Bronze Age work of art was discovered in 1814 by farm workers digging in peat moss. The Tribley Shield belonged to a high ranking native Celt of 1,500 BC. The shield owner seems to have lost it trying to cross a peat bog in the Bronze Age.

The siting of finds in the west of the Chester-le-Street District shows the strong liking these ancient peoples had for high ground. Because of it the Romans called them 'Brigante' or Hill Folk.

The lower lying banks of the Wear where the town of Chester-le-Street now stands were by no means deserted then. The river was a major Iron Age highway and the trees about it already cleared away. The local Celtic word for the ground there meant 'Place of the Horse People' which was only slightly Romanised into the name Concagium.



(Above) The place of the Horse People. Piebald ponies still graze on the banks of the Cone Burn in 1992, a two thousand year old tradition two minutes walk from today's Front Street.

(Left) A hammered metal shield of the late Bronze Age, unearthed near Pelton Fell in 1814 by farm workers digging peat. In perfect condition when discovered with its wood and leather backing still intact, it had the misfortune to then be sliced up like a pie and given away to different people. The metal punch and die work design is similar to other rare north eastern finds suggesting these shields might all have been locally made.

(Right) Tribal Warfare. This stone carving found at Chester-le-Street captures one of the old Horse People, shield in hand, ready to do battle.



the first left  
creatures

ing the

sed the are  
ster-le-

District  
the Beake  
ss pattern  
e day the

discovered  
king native  
ronze Age  
these  
ill Folk.  
ere by no  
dy cleared  
was only



graze on  
old

earthed  
perfect  
ing still  
and given  
esign is  
ields

r-le-Street  
to do



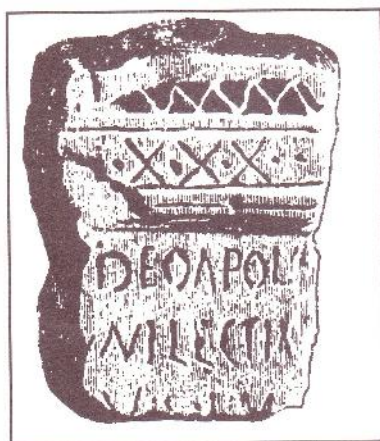
When the Romans arrived to build their fort Concagium at Chester-le-Street half way through the 2nd Century AD the District was no wild region of trackless forest. Woodland was already felled, there were settlements, enclosures, hedgebanks and trackways. Crops were being raised by the native British whose little communities spread about the District were the forerunners of many of the present day villages.

When the Roman fort and civilian encampment were added to the pattern there was a striking resemblance to the modern town's layout and to its links with surrounding settlements today.

Soldiers of the Roman Second Legion 'the August', helped build the fort at Chester-le-Street. They never missed an opportunity to leave their calling card, usually a stone block inscribed with their regimental cypher, 'LEG.II.AUG.' These have been found at Chester-le-Street and right across Roman Durham and Northumberland. Interestingly there are still men living in Chester-le-Street today who repaid the long overdue compliment. In World War 2, Chester-le-Street soldiers serving with the Tyne Tees Division left behind their own 'T.T.' initials on buildings right around the shores of the Mediterranean to mark their passing, just as the Second Legion had done between the Tyne and the Tees nearly 1800 years before.

The people of Chester-le-Street are incurably proud of their imperial past; it's something they catch at an early age and rarely recover from. Chester-le-Street wasn't that significant in Roman times. It was one of the later forts, an afterthought, a stop gap staging post between the main lines of communication. Roman Chester-le-Street is far more important to the people of today than it ever was in Roman times. It's part of their identity, their sense of being older, more distinguished and different from the younger communities of surrounding districts.

Any respectable new hole in the ground will have a dozen local people around it in no time. If the garrison commander of the Legionary Fort could have generated such devotion to things Roman in the local population of his day he would have retired to his villa and vineyards a happy man.



(Above) Even as late as the 1930s, amateur Chester-le-Street historians had to make hasty sketches of Roman finds, such as this altar stone and tablet, both bearing the cypher of the Legion that built the fort in the second century, before they were smashed up for hard core and fed into the cement mixer.

(Right) Dainty Diana? A face from Chester-le-Street's past. The remains of a Roman earthenware flagon from the fourth century AD.

(Below) Many a time in years gone by has a Chester-le-Street labourer supplemented his wages with a pocket full of Roman coins to sell. When there was nothing to spare for shop bought toys he could still fetch home half a dozen bits of Roman pottery for his children to play with, as smooth as Horners Toffee, and better than any jig-saw money could buy.



ECHOES  
OF AN  
IMPERIAL  
PAST.



the  
of  
;  
ss  
ng  
res  
s of  
r  
l  
If  
an





A thousand years ago, before there was a nation state called England or a County by the name of Durham, there was a Chester-le-Street, or Cunecestra as it was called in the Saxon mother tongue.

Chester-le-Street, Cunecestra then, was the pounding heart of Anglo-Saxon life in the north, the seat of regional government, a high centre of Northumbrian culture and being home to the most sacred shrine of northern Christianity, virtually the soul of the region too.

By 10th century standards its handful of buildings set among the rubble of a Roman army camp was a great city centre. Here in a hundred years' succession sat the nine Bishops of Chester-le-Street, overlords of a vast domain reaching as far west as Carlisle and the Irish Sea and northwards to Edinburgh and the coastlands of the Forth.

At the end of the 10th century those wild Dark Age boundaries of the Bishopric of Chester-le-Street hacked out by battle axe and defended in God's name began to buckle. Viking raids unseated Aldune the last Bishop of Chester-le-Street who sought temporary sanctuary for himself, the holy relics in his keeping and his court, in Yorkshire. Neither Bishop, relics, nor court returned to Chester-le-Street; they chose instead a new and better defended city site at Durham.

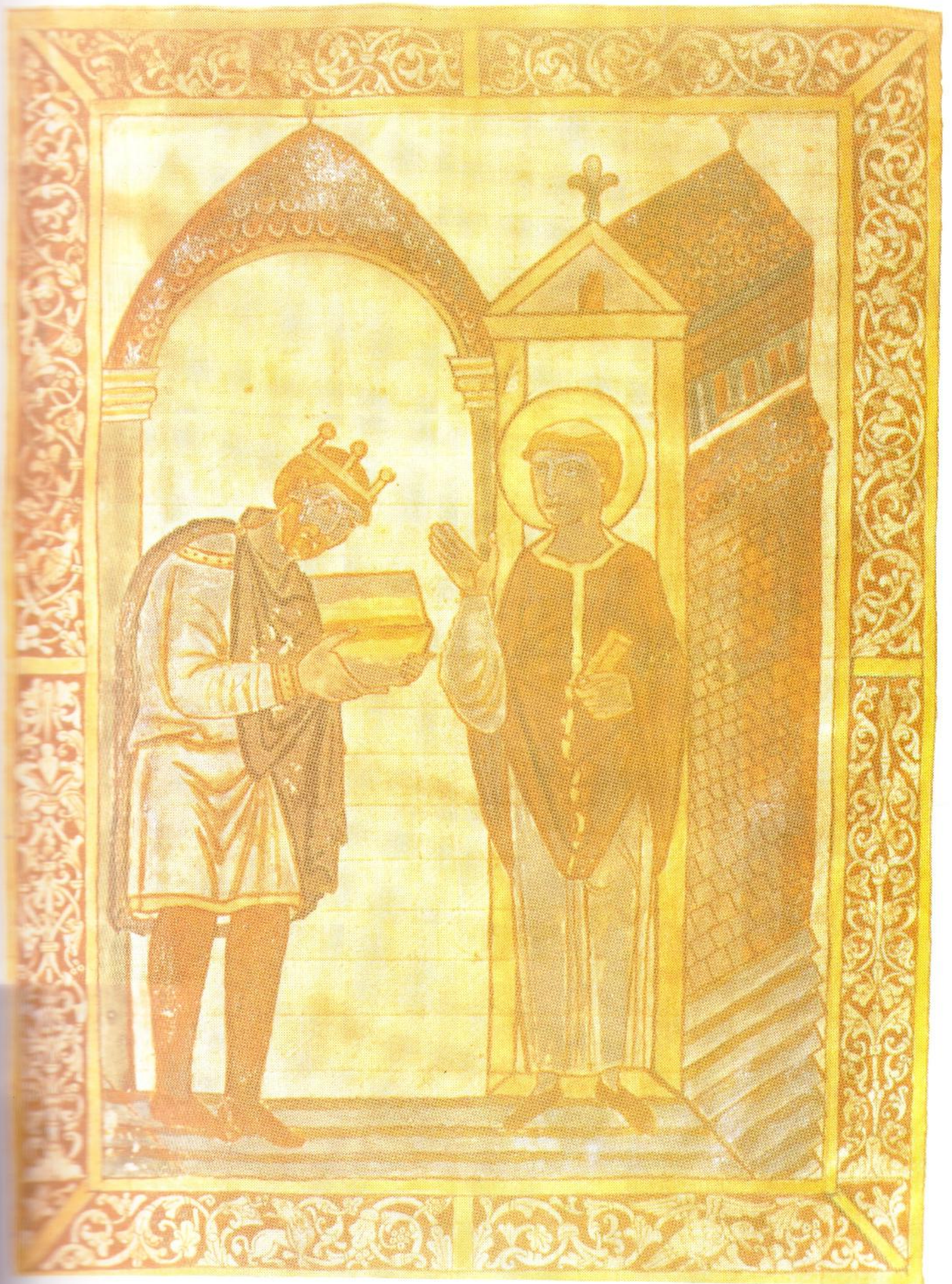
Chester-le-Street was never restored to its former glory as the centre of Anglo Saxon regional power, but it bears the distinction of being the cradle of local government and administration in the north.

The Saxon Bishops of Chester-le-Street, as the original keepers of St Cuthbert's shrine, the heirs to St Cuthbert's throne, guardians of the lands of St Cuthbert and leaders of his people left their own stamp upon the credentials of the Norman governors who were to follow. In the 12th and 13th centuries the successors to the Saxon Bishops of Chester-le-Street at Durham used the ancient prestige and liberties associated with Chester-le-Street and St Cuthbert to create that most awesome breed of local governors ever seen in England - the Prince Bishops of the County Palatine.



*Ancient Seat of Government. A Bishop's Throne still stands empty in 20th century Chester-le-Street, a powerful reminder that the town was once a city and the capital of a great Northumbrian See.*





The towers visited by the Bishops of Chester-le-Street were once immense, and the greatest in the land came to them for guidance. This 10th century manuscript shows Edward the Great, grandson of Alfred the Great, head bowed and bearing a precious gift for the shrine of St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street.



...AND  
MODERN.  
THE  
COMMON  
LANDS  
AND  
BORDER  
STONES OF  
CHESTER-  
LE-STREET  
DISTRICT.

For Chester-le-Street and its people communal lands and boundaries are not just random dots on an Ordnance Survey map, they are deep rooted sign posts to the history of their long inhabited landscape. Any notion the local population might entertain about who they are and where they are leans very heavily upon their common lands and border stones, and the power of such things has not diminished with age.

In recent years even the fine tuning of local boundaries caused tremendous heartache when Chester-le-Street people in some of the community's border areas were forced to turn their backs on family ties and become the furthest flung and least known fringe of some neighbouring borough.

Not even Chester-le-Street's boundaries, for all they were blessed by a Saxon Saint, have proved to be sacred or immovable. Chester-le-Street has seen almost as many changes in its role and in its boundaries as there have been new weathercocks on its old church steeple, and the winds of change have blown them back and forth at will.

How boundaries might best serve the powers that be, the wishes of the people and the needs of the time is a tug of war which still goes on today. As a great Saxon Bishopric, a huge ward of Parliament in Georgian times, and a modern day Council district directly descended from a powerful County Parish, Chester-le-Street knows all about such matters.

Between the boundary markers of today lies what remains of Chester-le-Street's common ground, the land of an ancient community, land that once stretched to the Durham Coast, across the Pennines into Cumbria and northward beyond the Scottish borders. Today's District Council's lands and boundaries fall far short of the Saxon Bishopric's but they are a good match for the contours of Chester-le-Street the Tudor Parish. For 400 years the townships of the Elizabethan landscape have looked to Chester-le-Street and still do, come what may, be that the Black Death or the Battle of the Somme.

They've held together, Great and Little Lumley, Lambton, Plawsworth, Edmondsley, Walldridge, Pelton, Urpeth and Ouston, a recognisable neighbourhood, a compact slice of the banks and braes of Middle Wear, whose sky lines are familiar and whose landmarks are so well known to the local people.

It's a modern day District that can be made sense of in an ancient way. Find a good place to look about you. What you can see clearly is Chester-le-Street District. What lies over the hill or you can't quite make out is somewhere else, and someone else's district.



*A late 20th century boundary marker from Chester-le-Street District.*





*A late 9th century Long Stone boundary  
marker from Saxon Chester-le-Street.*



# I M M I G R A N T S A N D I N V A D E R S

THE FORGING  
OF A  
COMMUNITY.

**H**istory and Geography have done their best to deny Chester-le-Street the dubious advantage of being entirely self-contained. Living astride an undefended and well trodden invasion route, its people have had to learn to be open minded and welcoming to strangers and their different ways. Yet by the same token Chester folk have had to be doubly determined to hold onto their own identity and occasionally to their very lives.

It's a clever kind of double act that has been performed for centuries and it's produced a breed that is something to be reckoned with. The people of Chester-le-Street District are a marvellous identikit of Roman stock and Iron Age Hill Folk, Pagan Norsemen and slightly less Pagan Saxons, Mediaeval lords and local ladies, Irish Colleens and Kilkenny Colliers.

Since the Bronze Age Chester-le-Street has been a melting pot of cultures, peoples, talents and temperament, and no doubt the District is all the richer for that.

Yet on occasions the community has refused point blank to scrap the old and mould themselves to the new. That streak of affection for custom and tradition, a dislike of distant dictators, and a wish to run their affairs in their own way has sometimes been the death of them.

Nineteen years before the mighty Spanish Armada plucked up the courage to take on 'Good Queen Bess', Chester-le-Street District bore arms in open rebellion against her sovereign crown and person, in defence of the old Catholic faith, the Latin mass and the monastic tradition. Royal and Rebel forces met in the steep sloped woodlands of Chester Dene and the District's population paid a bloody price for the privilege.

The telltale thin black line of sooty soil sometimes seen when old foundation stones are uncovered reminds us of the grievous bodily harm done to old Chester-le-Street by invaders. Dutch troops in the 18th century peppered Elsie Marley's Ale House sign with musket balls as they marched by, and thought it a jolly sport. When General Lesley rode by in the Civil War the destruction was far from playful. That grizzled veteran of many a cruel and brutal European war gave his army full rein to unleash whatever amount of destruction on Chester-le-Street District they had a mind to.

Thankfully not all visitors to the town have come with such bad intentions. 19th century industrial growth sparked off a more peaceful invasion of the District, and the coming of the Irish miners was one of many stages in the forging of Chester-le-Street District's identity.

Outsiders coming in, proving their worth, earning acceptance and influencing their hosts is a time-honoured Chester-le-Street District tradition, adding fire and fun to the iron of the local blood.

Chester-le-Street is still the kind of place where you can come and make your mark. Not everyone who has enjoyed contentment, prosperity, success or risen to distinction there was a district native born and bred, and the age old invitation challenge to do so is still open to all comers.



*This battle scene from a 12th century Durham bible reminds us of the dark side to Chester-le-Street District's past.*





*Chester-le-Street has not relied on home grown talent entirely. Being set on a meeting of the ways, it's never had to. Some of its most distinguished were originally from elsewhere, like Jack Lawson (right) who came from Cumberland, and George William Horner (left) from Norfolk, one a socialist, the other a capitalist.*

*Jack Lawson went down the coal mines at 12 years old and served as a private soldier in the Great War. He then became a Member of Parliament, Secretary of State for War, and a Lord. George William Horner didn't get to be a Lord but took on a run down little jam factory and turned it into a multi million pound business whose products became a household name worldwide.*



*(Above and right) They were a knockout! During World War II young men from all over the country called up for national service in the coal mines came to Chester-le-Street. Hundreds of them were sent to live at the hostel at South Pelaw and to work in the local collieries. Like the invaders of old Chester-le-Street soon won them over and a temporary visit for many soon became a lifelong stay.*



*(Right) Many outsiders over the years have fallen for the charms of Chester-le-Street District and made the place their home.*



*■ Civil War sword used in battle under the command of General Lesley*





Chester-le-Street has long been an important link in the nation's road and rail network, and a linchpin of local communications.

The Wear Valley funnelled most Iron Age traffic through the District. Ancient travellers could wade the Wear at Chester-le-Street or gain easy access to the higher ground on either side.

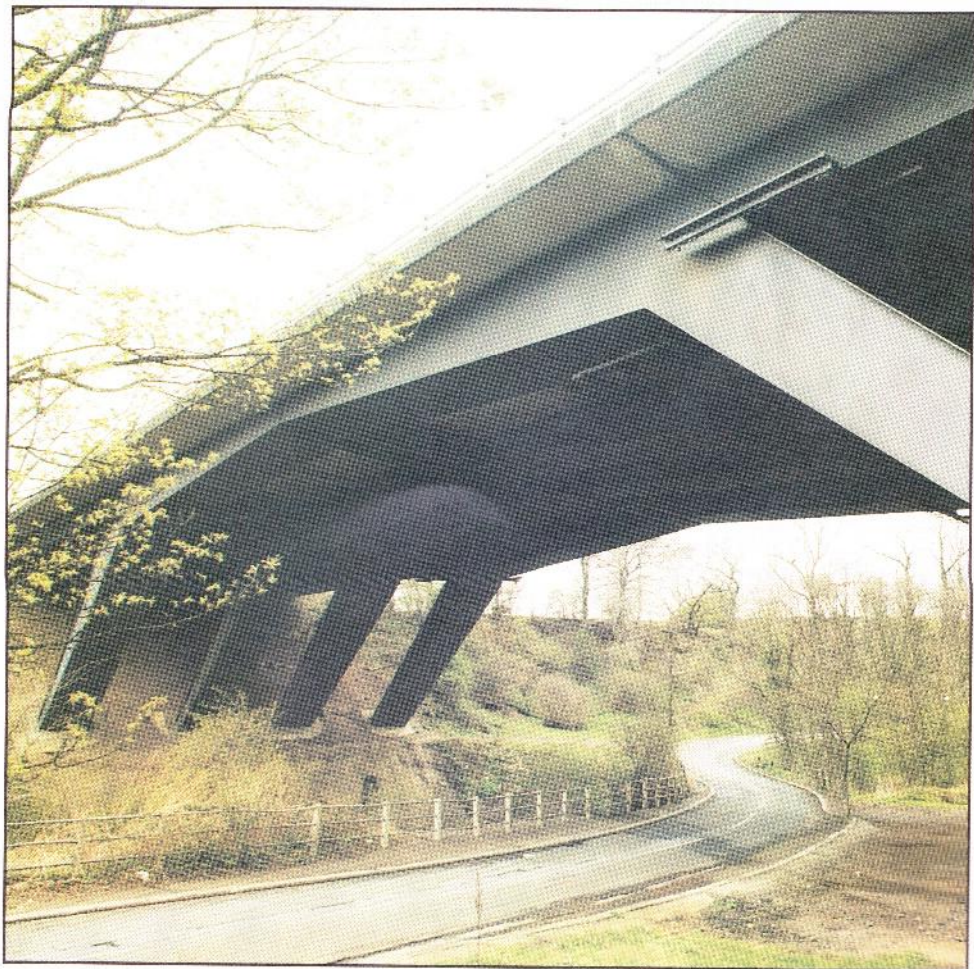
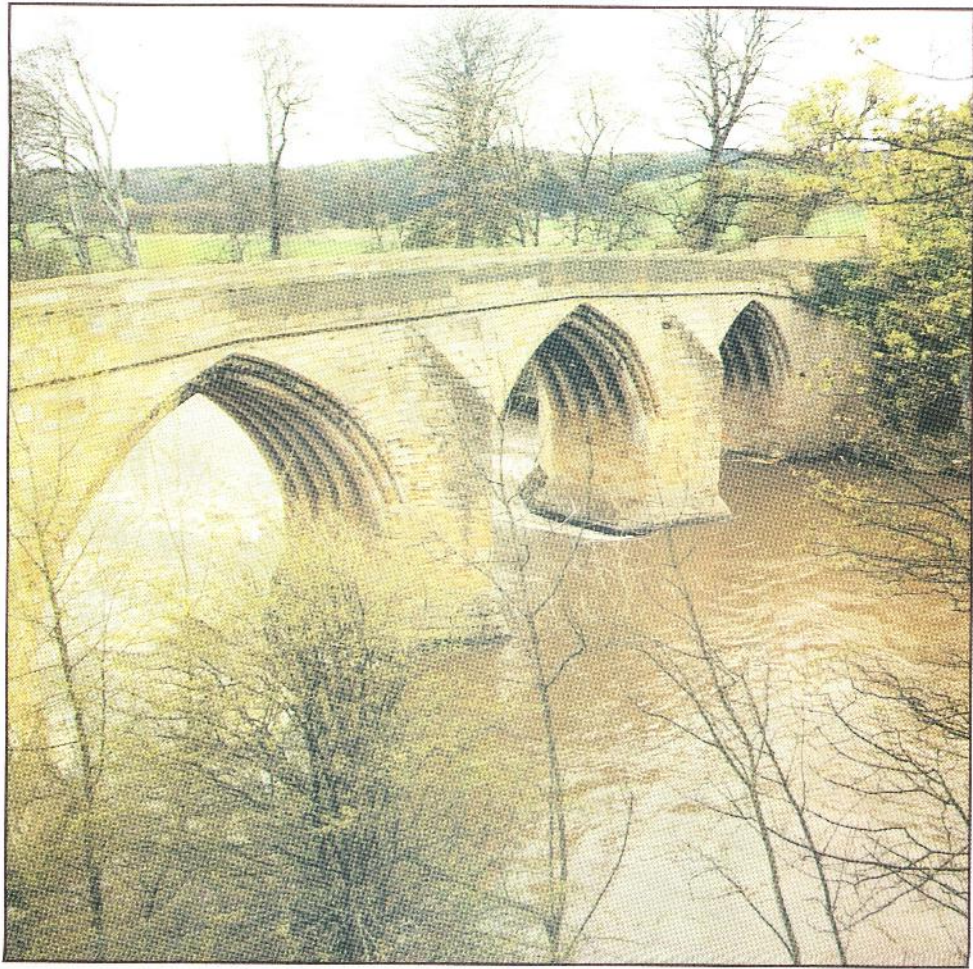
It was the Roman road builders who put the District firmly on the modern travel map. Known locally as Ermin Street, the old Roman Way became the Great North Road of 18th century stage coach travel, and the A1 of the 20th century motor car.

The main line railway of the Steam Age joining London to Edinburgh was laid through Chester-le-Street in the 1860s, although wooden waggonways and iron railed tracks had already linked local collieries to the banks of the Tyne and Wear for years.

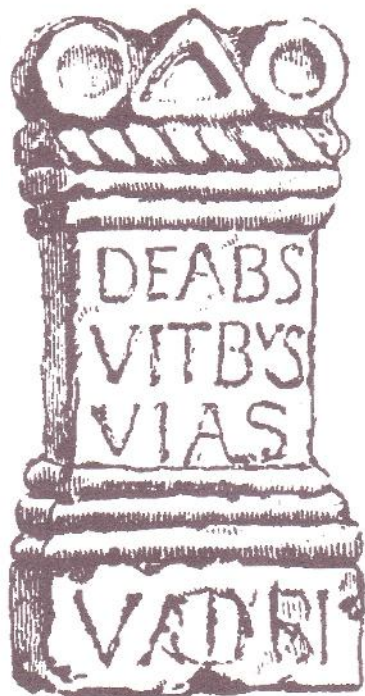
A few yards from where the Wear keel boats plied their trade 200 years before runs the modern day A1(M). Nature always gave travellers and trade goods a helping hand through the District but the mighty motorway had little need of it, slicing confidently through the countryside and striding the Wear with a single leap. Its Chester-le-Street interchange, the main north Durham motorway exit and entry point, gives the District an important present day role in communications as well as an interesting and distinguished past.

*Chester-le-Street District's heard them all before, the paddle splash from dug-out canoes, the hob nailed tramp of Roman Legionary sandals, the clatter of the pack horse hoof and the shouts of the Keel boat men. Past and present crowd together, the buttressed stonework bridge of the 14th century mason (above) and the boxed steel girder span of 20th century Theodolite Man (below).*







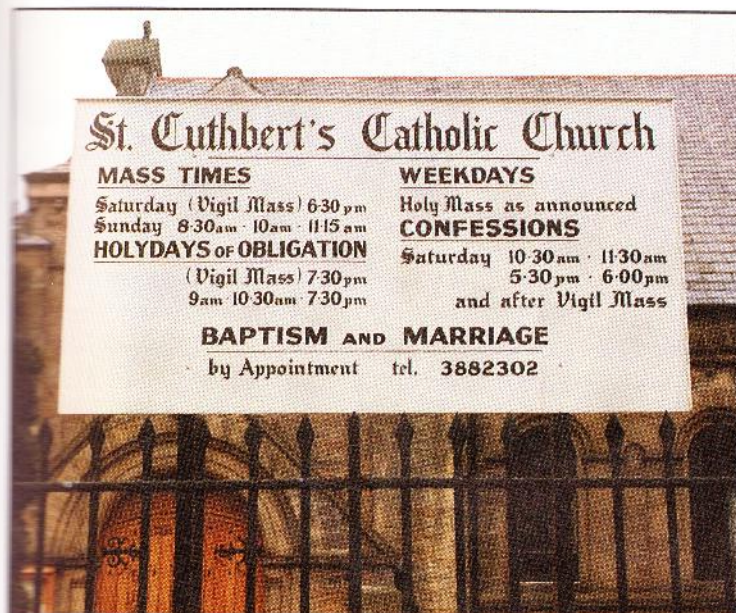


Chester-le-Street has long been a centre of worship for the people of the District, and still is. The inscription on a small foot high Romano-British altar from Chester-le-Street, easily a thousand years older than the Cuthbert Bell, tells of its dedication "To the Ancient Gods" and in particular to the water sprites of the River Wear!

That comfortably takes the tradition of worship at Chester-le-Street back to a time before recorded history. Few districts could boast such a long and lively line of worship.







A world famous symbol of Old English christianity. This 7th Century cross worn by St Cuthbert lay in his shrine at Chester-le-Street during the 9th and 10th Centuries.



**C**oal Field Congregations. A lot of Durham miners had a liking for non-conformist worship. The great John Wesley preached at Chester-le-Street and Methodism took root in the town, while the Irish miners who came to the District in great numbers brought back Catholicism. The Salvation Army flourished too, and many a colliery bandsman first learned his skills with trombone or cornet as a boy in the "Sally Ann".



For such hallowed ground Chester-le-Street District seems to have attracted more than its fair share of hobgoblins, wraiths and demons. Perhaps the Powers of Darkness had to make an extra special effort seeing that Chester-le-Street was the backyard of a great Saxon Saint.

There was hardly a highway or byway out of the town that was not the night time haunt of some apparition or other. The West Road had the Pelton Swine, six black pigs that brought bad luck to all who saw them. The North Road had the Picktree Brag with its wardrobe full of ghostly guises, sometimes appearing as a wild horse, a calf, or a headless man to name but a few of them. The East Road had Old Nick himself ready to waylay miners who had the cheek to invade his underworld domain. Strangely the road to the south was demon free. Probably the prospect of heading to Yorkshire was frightening enough.

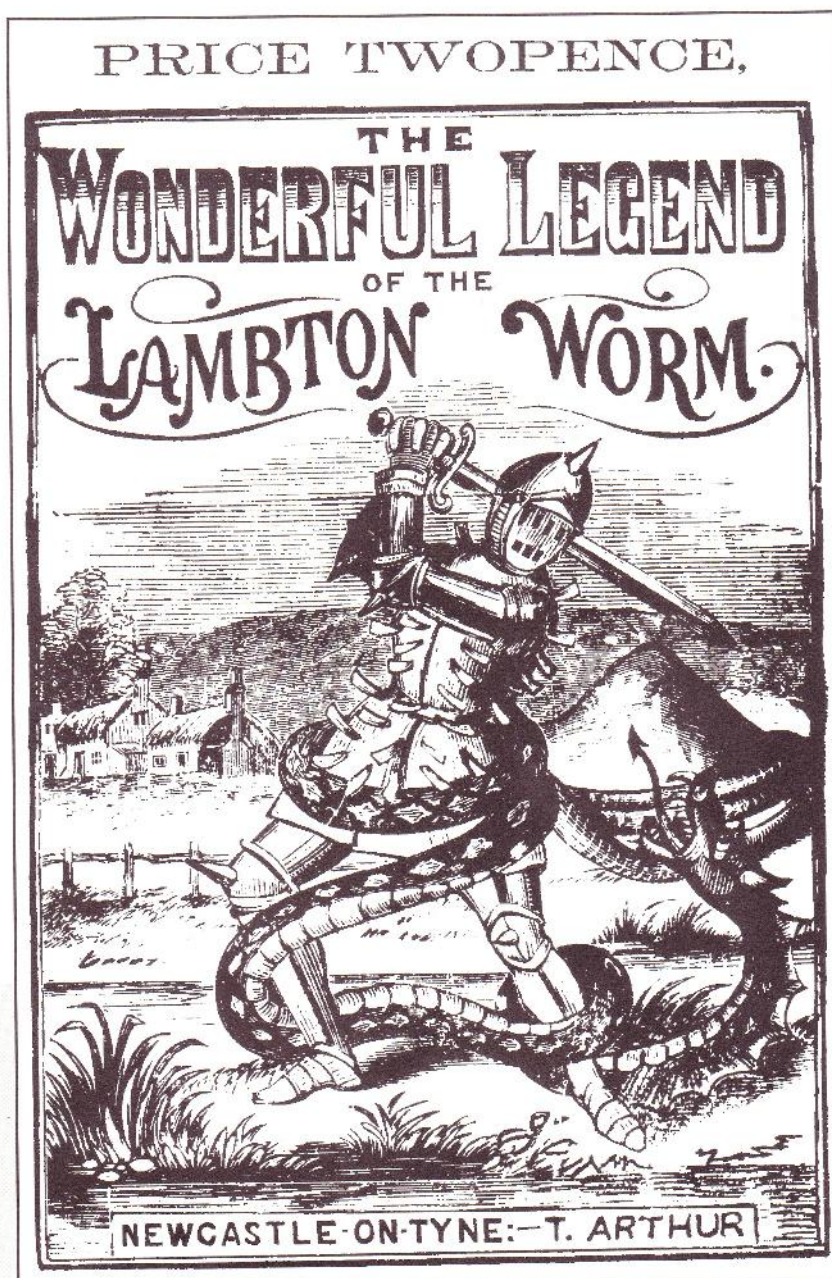
Small wonder Chester-le-Street became a halt for travellers if canny landlords dropped a hint about what lurked behind the local hedgerows after dark. No doubt the folk of the district made the most of it too, and many a late return from the Ale House dishevelled and worse for wear was put down to an encounter with the other local spirits.

Some of the mine workings beneath Chester-le-Street District were centuries old. Scores of colliers had died violent deaths there and blown to bits or buried in the cinder shard, lacked a grave to rest in. The work day hurly burly of the pit banished such thoughts from the mind but on lonely Sunday inspection shifts when there was nothing to hear but dripping water and groaning pit props, the notion of the souls who never left the pit hung heavy in the air. Two Chester-le-Street miners were about to set out in different directions on their solitary Sunday vigils underground when one asked what if he should find the way barred by ghostly colliers. His companion's advice was to set them all to work and they wouldn't be back to bother him next Sunday.

If lore and legend are the rare hallmarks of the most ancient of communities, and the possession of peculiar traditional stories that are told often, with pride and pleasure, then Chester-le-Street District passes that sterling test with flying colours.

## ...AND DEMONS. THE SUPERNATURAL HISTORY OF CHESTER- LE-STREET.

*Cover of the little booklet sold by T Huntley of Chester-le-Street in 1875. A District rich in ancient rhymes and legends, Sir Cuthbert Sharp, the early folklorist, gathered much material from the little villages around Chester-le-Street, including the ancient "Collier's Rant", the oldest known mining song in the English language.*





# THE BATTLE OF SHROVE TIDE

Ancient customs such as the Shrove Tuesday Football match once played up and down Chester-le-Street Front Street bear witness to the District's own distinctive folk heritage.

It's 60 years since the Upstreeters and Downstreeters last did battle, yet old postcards of those annual matches are still treasured locally and any anecdotes directly linking families with the game are told with pride.

The most minor details to do with the event are listened to with near reverence. Knowing the ball was thrown out at 1 o'clock would be considered impressive. Knowing the ball was always made by Tommy Dalkin out of 6 strips of leather, nothing less than dazzling.

The Police were thought awful spoilsports when they blew the final whistle on the game in 1932. Certainly plate glass shop windows and large public affrays do not mix well. The match was outlawed on the grounds of serious risk of injury to players and spectators as well as the likelihood of damage to property. The last people to try to play the game were arrested and marched off under a heavy escort of constables.

It was the end of a District tradition going back to the Middle Ages. In olden times the match had been the last chance to let off steam before the sober weeks of Lent began.

The game started halfway up the Front Street with the ball being thrown from an upstairs window. The aim was to get the ball to the top of the street or to the bottom by fair means or foul, usually the latter. Rules were few and far between and such niceties as how big teams should be or how long the contest should last were not strictly defined.

98% riotous assembly and 2% sporting event, it was a savage form of amusement that drew tremendous crowds. Being anywhere near the ball must have been a very dubious privilege yet the frantic struggle for possession of that little leather object is the stuff of local legend.



It seems a sorry little thing to have caused so much trouble, and difficult to take seriously - more of a Christmas pudding fallen on hard times or a stray haggis than respectable football. Whether or not it really once was a Scotsman's head is a fact mercifully lost in the mists of time.



Preparing the pitch, Shrove Tuesday Morning 1911.





Throwing out the ball, Shrove Tuesday Football, Chester-le-Street.

*The Shrove Tuesday match begins*



*The winning Upstreet Team of the 1903 match.*



# FROM OLD REGIONAL CAPITAL

...TO MODERN DAY COUNCIL DISTRICT.

As long as records of such things have been kept the reviewing and remodelling of the governing of Chester-le-Street has been as regular as clockwork. Every other hundred years or so on the turn of the century at quarter past the old one or at quarter to the next, the titles, make up and functions of Chester-le-Street's local courts and councils have been dismantled and reassembled.

As might be expected of an ancient community once famed for the quality of its foundry iron and fetter work, each link in the unbroken chain of its local government loops with and holds fast to the last. Because of that today's District Council can trace its roots with no loose ends or fanciful connection right back to the Saxon Bishops of Chester-le-Street's Court at Cunecestra.

The late 20th Century Civic Centre's cluster of accountants, administrators, planners and decision makers and throng of rent and tax payers, applicants for grants, permissions and seekers after services are not far removed geographically, by tradition, culture or purpose from the Court of Eardulph, last Bishop of Lindisfarne and first Bishop of Chester-le-Street, with its 10th century pilgrims and petitioners, clerks, scholars, legislators and advisors.

When Aldune, the last Bishop of Chester-le-Street and first Bishop of Durham left to find a safer haven from the Vikings, his successors always sent the Bishop's Halmote Court back to sit at Chester-le-Street on their behalf and decide on matters of local importance. It would have been unseemly for the people of the ancient Saxon capital of the north to journey to the new Norman capital at Durham City to have their affairs attended to.

Nothing tried and tested disappears overnight in a place like Chester-le-Street. One tradition tends to overlap the other and the Bishop's Halmote Court, minus the immense power it wielded in the Middle Ages still met in the town as late as the 1920s.

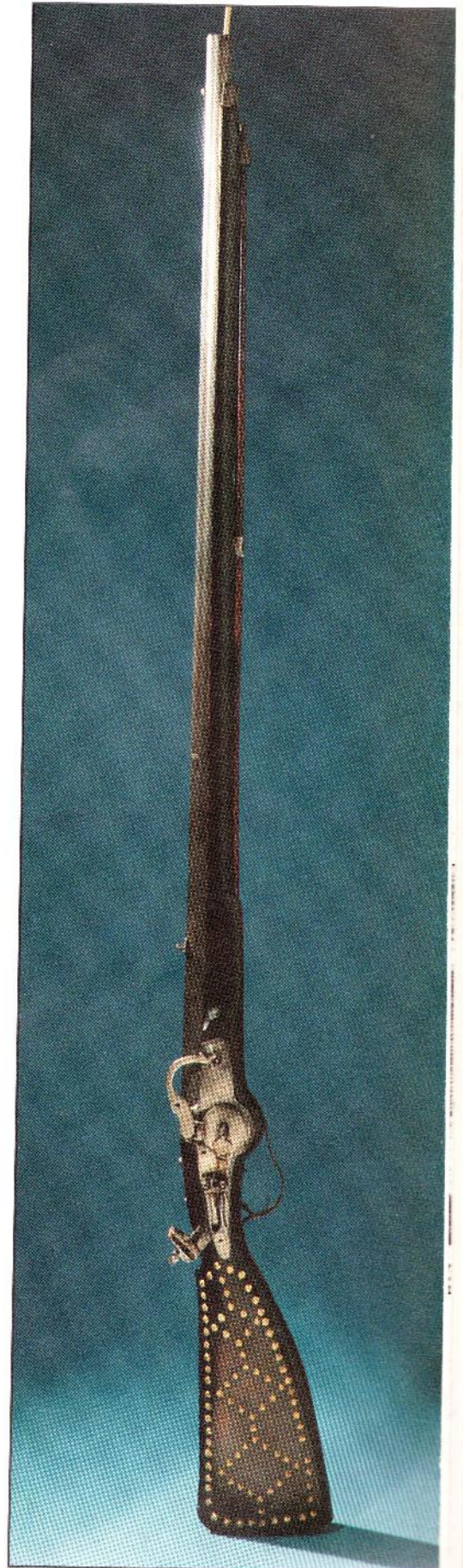
In Tudor and Stuart times everyday District matters were left in the hands of the local Church Council. These were Chester-le-Street's great and good, 'ye Gentlemen and ye Four and Twenty'. They held sway for 200 years or more, forerunning the Parish Guardians who handed over their civic duties in late Victorian times to the Rural District Council.

The worthies and notables of the 'Four and Twenty' set Chester-le-Street's taxes and collected them. They penalised those who would not pay and to show their teeth bought a bloodhound and a musket for the Town Watch.

The 'Four and Twenty' had new roads built and repaired the old, passed bye laws and fined those who disobeyed. On their authority food and shelter was found for widows, orphans, shipwrecked sailors and the like, the dead were buried and the affairs of the living set in order by them.

The bonds that link the present District Council with the past speak for themselves.

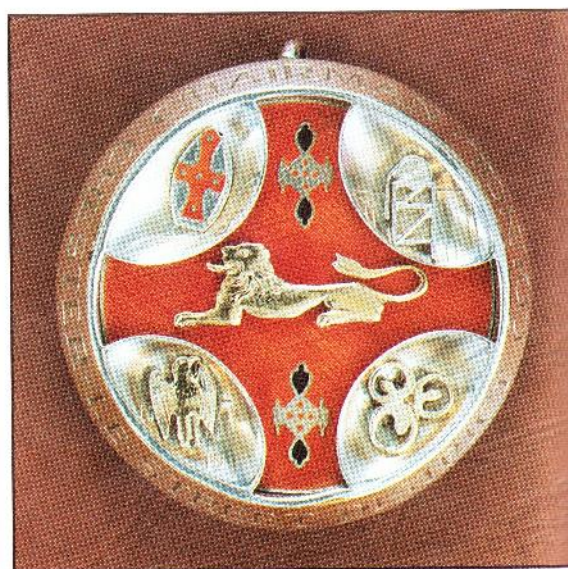
*The duties of the District Council of today have many curious links with Chester-le-Street's Council of Tudor and Stuart times. Today's Council no longer keeps its own pack of bloodhounds for the pursuit and apprehension of felons, although its role as District "watchdog" is as strong as ever, and whilst it no longer buys matchlock muskets to keep the peace and maintain the law, as a Local Authority responsibility for the upkeep of many Acts of Parliament still lies with the District Council lock, stock and barrel.*





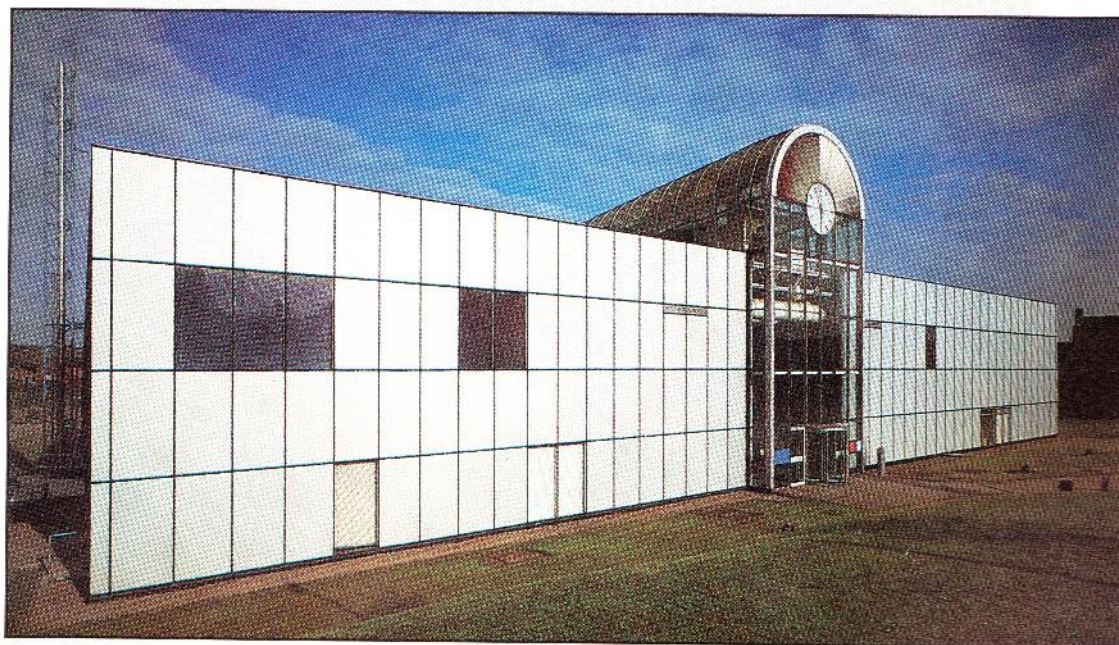


*Seals of Approval. In the 16th century this permission to build a colliery at Chester-le-Street was granted by the Bishop of Durham. The Bishop's blessing for such enterprises is no longer sought and his power in such matters handed down to Chester-le-Street District Council.*



*The cross of St Cuthbert, once worn around the Saxon Saint's neck, was the original symbol of Chester-le-Street's status as a 9th Century local authority. That gold and garnet cross is reflected in the design of the 20th Century symbol of local authority worn around the neck of today's District Council Chairman.*





*Part of the local scene of yesteryear and the townscape of today. St Mary's House, the old Urban District Council Offices (top), Union Offices, the Rural District Council HQ (middle), and (bottom) the modern Civic Centre that replaced them.*



Chester-le-Street is the kind of place that could win prizes for community history and it actually has done.

The 1990 "Sweet Memories" exhibition at Chester-le-Street Library on life at the local toffee factory brought school children and old age pensioners together so successfully the event won a major national award reserved for outstanding projects with a high degree of community involvement.

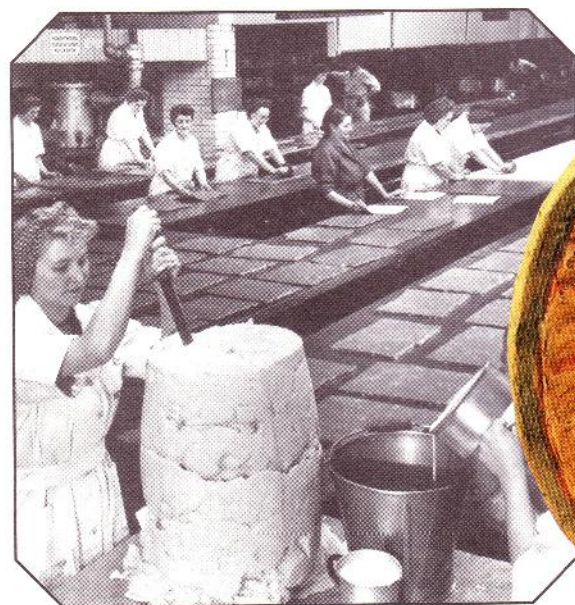
It speaks volumes about the depth of feeling Chester-le-Street people have for their own past. An initially modest project about a toffee works that disappeared 30 years ago accidentally tapped into the wealth of local pride and found itself hurled by that unexpected power surge into the highest ranks of a national competition - and winning it.



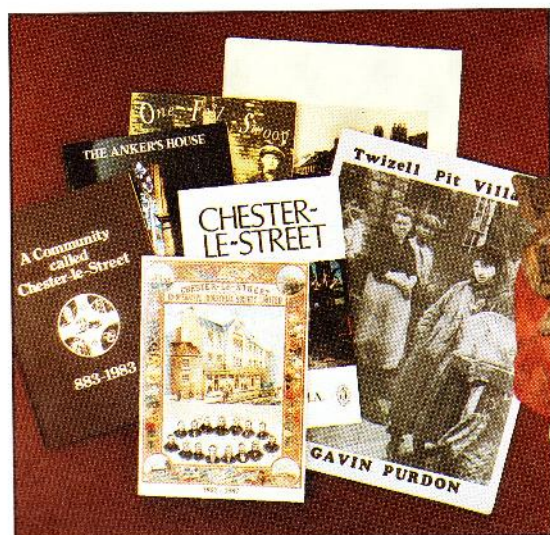
From 16th Century Lords of the Manor to 20th Century toffee makers Chester-le-Street people hold one thing in common, and that's a pride in their own past.

The doings of his ancestors was Lord John Lumley's (left) favourite subject and he saw to it that his dearly departed relatives had their likeness in stone set up in Chester-le-Street (far left) just in case anyone should ever forget about them.

Like old Lord Lumley, the women who made, wrapped and packed Dainty Dinah toffees from 1910 to 1960 (left middle) are proud of their past too, and were delighted to see the likeness of Dainty Dinah (below right) set up in Chester-le-Street Shopping Centre, just in case anyone should ever forget about her.



Symptoms of a healthy interest in local history. There never seems to be any shortage of enthusiasts when it comes to reading or writing about Chester-le-Street's past (below left).





## LOCAL HEROES

**B**ecause so many people deserve to share the distinction, choosing special individuals from the history of the District to stand as local heroes is no easy matter. Also a thought needs to be spared in such a contest for the so-called ordinary folk with no particular claim to fame who, down the years, put their body and soul into making Chester-le-Street District a decent place to live.

As far as orthodox local heroes go, Tommy Hepburn and Hedworth Lambton make a delightfully odd couple, for all kinds of reasons.

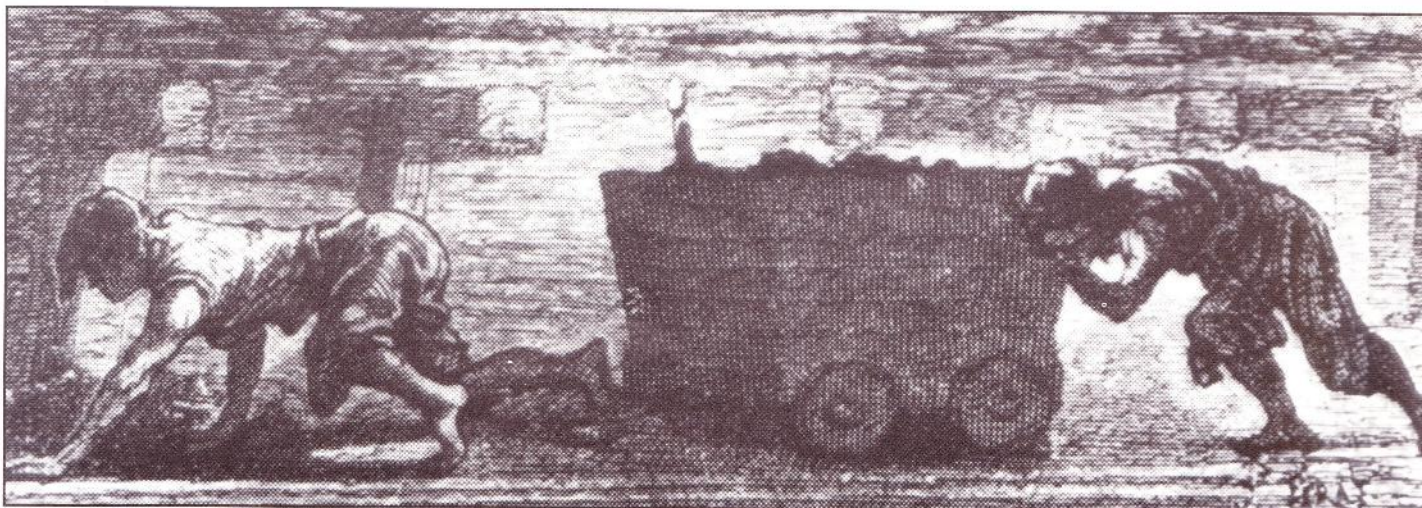
Tommy Hepburn, a native of Pelton, was born into poverty and died in it. His claim to fame was that of the Samaritan and Social Reformer. Hedworth Lambton's home was not far from Tommy Hepburn's but their walks of life were very different. Hedworth Lambton was the son of an aristocrat, heir to a great fortune, and one of nature's gladiators.

At a time in history when being a miners' leader was a surer ticket to the penal colony of New South Wales than it was a route to parliament, Tommy Hepburn boldly stood forth and sought a major reduction in the terribly long hours children had to work down the coal mines.

Hedworth Lambton for his part helped Britannia Rule the Waves. The Captain of the ironclad cruiser 'Powerful' stationed on the China Seas, he was every inch the very model of a gunboat diplomat.

His day came when the Boers laid siege to the British Garrison at Ladysmith. Without orders Hedworth Lambton embarked a whole battalion of Yorkshire infantry on his way to Durban, then had a battery of his smaller naval guns set on wooden wheels. Leaving his ship behind he rushed the whole makeshift brigade to Ladysmith and saved the day.

Tommy Hepburn and Hedworth Lambton were both natives of Chester-le-Street District, one compassionately driven to better the lot of his fellow creatures and protect society's most vulnerable members, one driven to outshine and outperform the opposition and 'devil take the hindmost'. Two rival traditions and the District's people are lucky enough to lay claim to both.



"A FEELING OF LONELINESS CAME OVER ME ... AS I LOOKED ON THE WALL OF COAL BEFORE AND BEHIND ME AND ON THE ROOF OVERHEAD HOME AND FRIENDS SEEMED A LONG WAY OFF IN THE WORLD ABOVE ... MY CANDLE WENT OUT, AND, ALL ALONE IN THE DARKNESS WHICH MIGHT ALMOST BE FELT, I SAT IN MY HOLE AFRAID TO BREATHE."

*The words of George Parkinson who in old age recalled his first shift underground as a Chester-le-Street pit boy during the 1800s.*

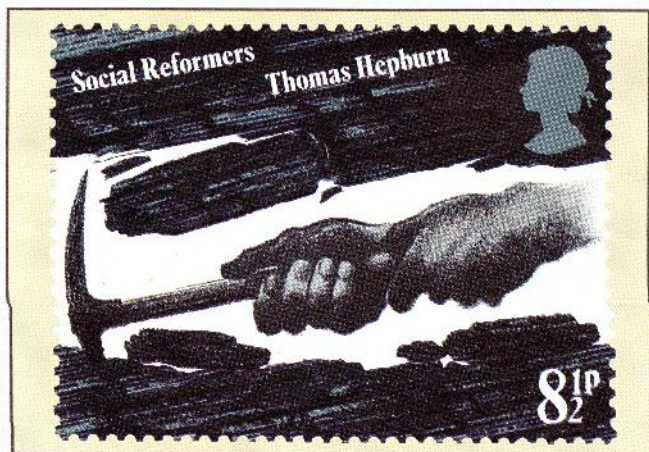
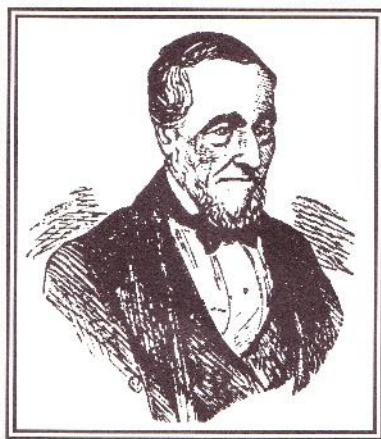


*Everyday heroes. The Little family from Twizell Colliery who, like thousands more in the shadow of the coal mines, tried to make Chester-le-Street District somewhere worth living.*





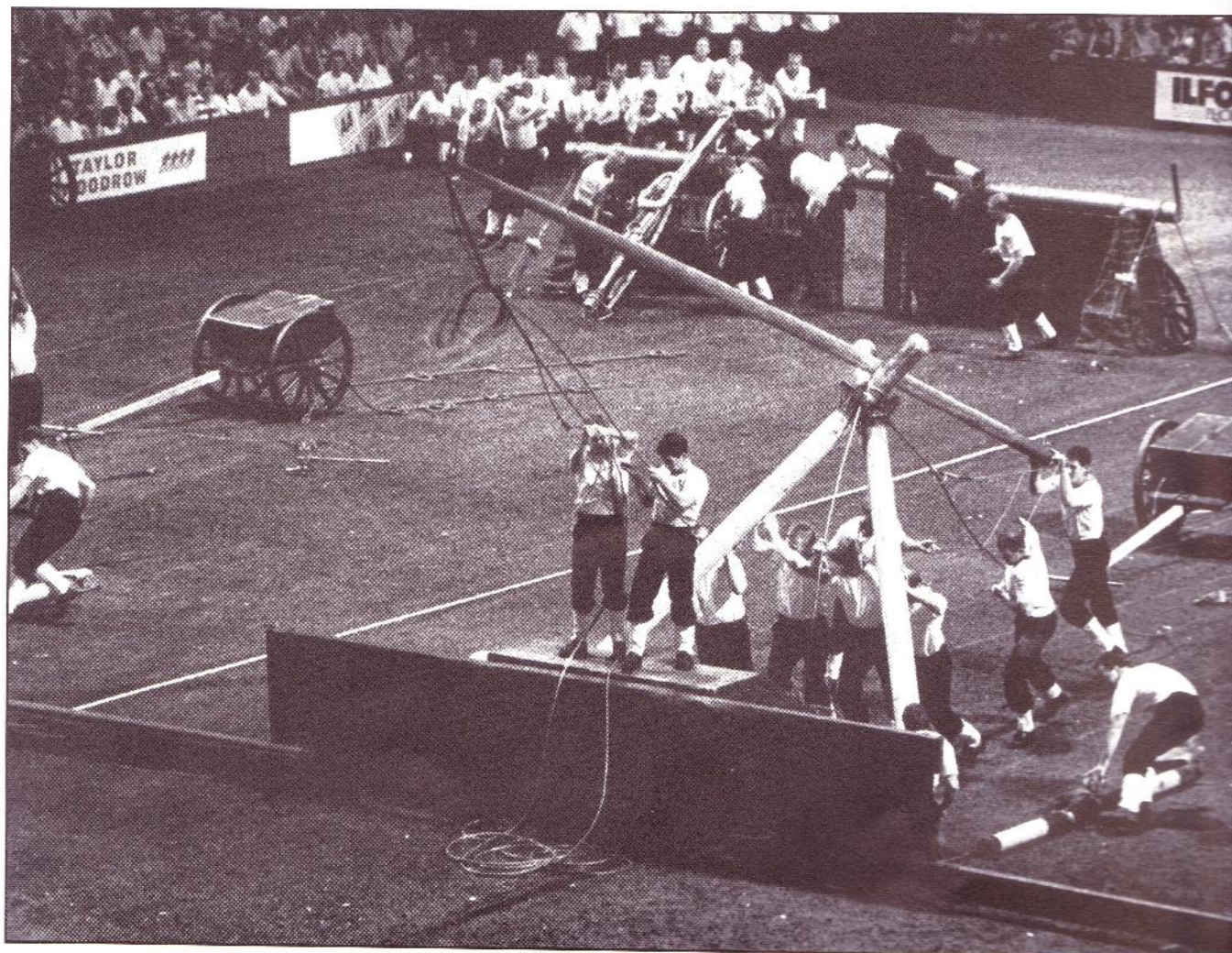
Wizell Colliery  
of the coal  
ect somewhere



*National Recognition. A postage stamp commemorating the achievements of Thomas Hepburn issued in 1976.*



*Portrait of a national hero, Hedworth Lambton R.N.*



*The run with the guns. Hedworth Lambton's dash from Durban to Ladysmith is celebrated every year at the Royal Tournament by the naval Field Gun Race.*



At one time the Durham Coal Industry was so widespread it used to be said that the whole County was held up by wooden pit props. Much has also been made of the manly skills that went into burrowing out the County's mineral wealth. Very little recognition however has ever gone to the women of the Durham coalfield. They were the taken for granted props on which the whole business really rested.

There are still one or two old women in Chester-le-Street District born at the turn of the century who can testify to the hard apprenticeship they were put to at an early age, and to the rough trade they were forced to follow in later life.

Lena Ramshaw, a coal hewer's daughter, was one of a family of six. She started learning how to look after pitmen when she was no more than knee high. As a tot it was her job to get the bait and bottles ready for her father and two brothers, filling the tin bottles with oatmeal water and making jam and bread for one brother, a bacon sandwich for another and sugar and bread for her father.

When the menfolk returned she had to take all of their dirty pit clothes outside and beat the coal dust out of them against the back yard wall.

Lena Ramshaw remembers having to grow up fast. She has memories of a lovely dress a neighbour made for her to wear at King George's Coronation Day Party in 1911, and two rag dolls for her birthday. A few months later, she had to run the household of a neighbour temporarily bedridden by the birth of twins. It was a dress rehearsal for her own future.

Mrs Holmes, another old Chester-le-Street District resident, remembers following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother. Women with a family in the pit were 'never done'. As one meat pudding was lifted off the fire another was put on. As one bath full of dirty water was tipped a clean one was filled. As one son went to bed another was to get up.

They were all to see off to the pit and greet back, one o'clock in the morning, eight o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the afternoon and ten at night.

There was a never ending deluge of washing, of cooking and cleaning, of making do and mending, not to mention the child bearing and the rearing of families. Men were the providers, and sometimes what was provided was very little. Women had to manage as best they could. What strikes you talking to women from this era is their intelligence, their dignity, their wit and kindness. How on earth these finer and higher feelings survived the test of early twentieth century times is beyond understanding.



*As a rule the factory wages of a young girl didn't amount to much, compared to what men made down the pit, but during the 1926 strike, which was a family emergency as well as a national one, Martha Sillett's wages kept the family going. With her father and brothers out on strike she found herself elevated to the heady heights of sole breadwinner.*



whole  
hills that  
s ever gone  
he whole

of the  
the rough

earning how  
the bait and  
d making  
father.  
d beat the

dress a  
rag dolls for  
ily

g in the  
one'. As one  
was tipped a

nt o'clock in

g do and  
viders, and  
. What  
nd kindness.  
times is



*The Dainty Dinahs. When they played football the men were left standing on the sidelines.*



*Carboniferous Woman and her Brood. Surrounded by her sons just back from the pit, Mary Anne Robinson stands at the gate of her cottage. In days when choice was restricted to pitman's wife or parlour maid women such as Nan Long, also in the picture, were a rare breed. She cared nothing for being wed to a miner or lighting other people's fires, bought a horse and cart instead and sold kippers for a penny a pair around the pit villages.*



Look in any churchyard around the old mining villages of Chester-le-Street District and you will find as many headstones to miners killed in the local collieries as you will find military graves from the two World Wars.

Chester-le-Street District has shared the huge death tolls of major mine disasters, but week in and week out at the loss of a putter here and at the cost of a coal hewer there a relentless struggle between life and death was waged and very often lost.

These incidents tended to be very private tragedies - no government commissions, front page stories of fund raising charities. The occasion might be marked by men coming back home early from the pit on the day of the accident and at the funeral the colliery banner draped in black would be paraded to the muffled beat of the big drum, and that was that. Only twice in history did the little mine disasters of Chester-le-Street District capture the attention of a wider audience.

Daniel Defoe, the famous 18th Century novelist and chronicler visited Chester-le-Street and putting pen to paper there, made brief notes in his journal on the hazards of the colliery trade.

"Here we had an account of a melancholy accident which happened in or near Lumley Park not long before we passed through the town. A new pit being dug, the workmen worked on in a vein of coal until they came to a cavity which as was supposed had formerly been dug from some other pit, but be it what it will, as soon as upon breaking into the hollow heart, the pent up air gave vent, it blew up like a mine of a thousand barrels of gunpowder and getting vent at the shaft of the pit, burst out with such a terrible noise, as made the earth tremble for some miles round and terrified the whole country. There was near three score poor people lost their lives and one or two as we were told, who were at the bottom of the shaft were blown quite out though sixty fathoms deep and were found dead upon the ground."

No doubt Defoe would have been much taken with the story of a latter day local Robinson Crusoe called Bob Richardson, marooned alone for a week in the flooded workings at Sacriston Colliery.

The loss of two men and a pit pony hardly seems likely material with which to fire the imagination of the Edwardian public but the Sacriston Mine Disaster of November 1902 did precisely that.

The story of how Bob Richardson, a Chester-le-Street District coal hewer trapped underground by floodwater cheated death for a week was avidly read in London, New York and right around the British Empire.

The hairsbreath escapes, the desperate courage of the rescue party and the incredible endurance of Bob Richardson were more like 'King Solomon's Mines' than events at Sacriston Colliery but every word was true. It is a powerful story still and one with a very strange epilogue. Years later Bob Richardson's son recalled how his father cheated death and got his life to live over.

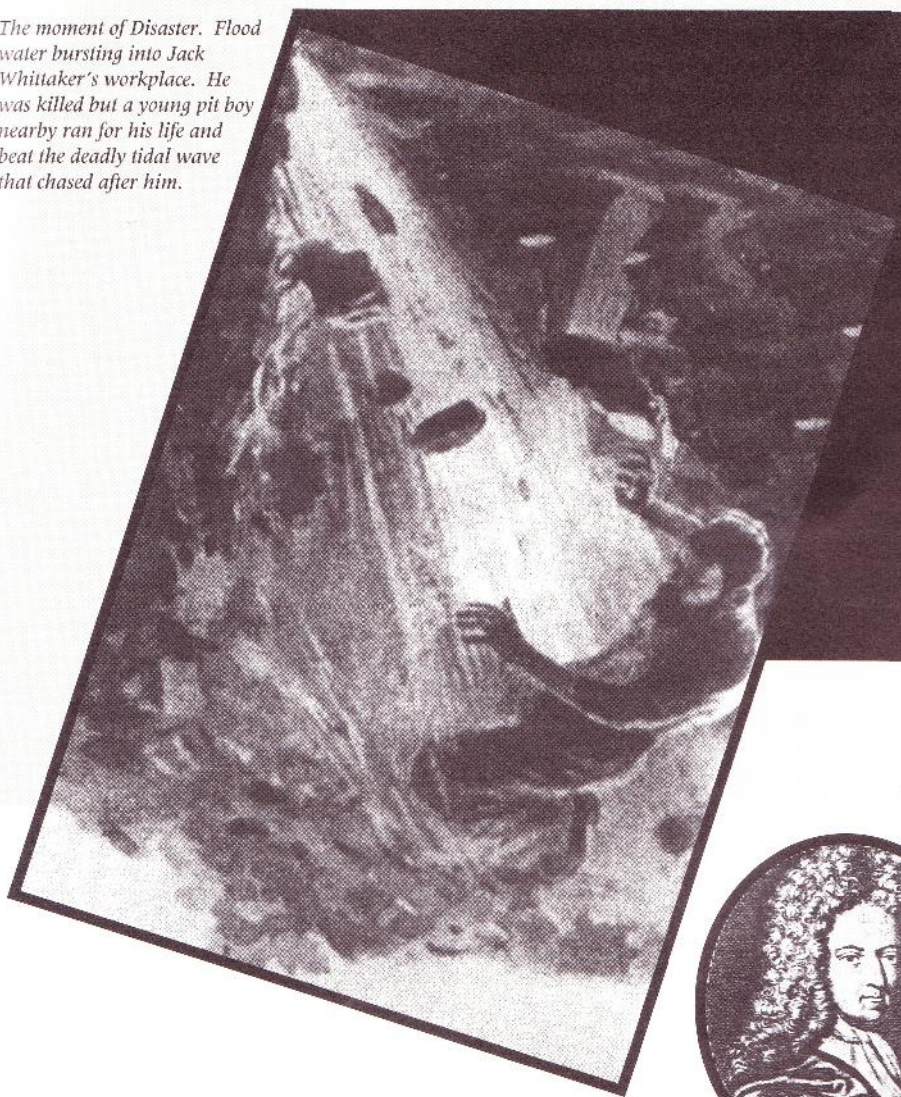
Bob Richardson's body was expected back from the pit after a week, not Bob Richardson. He was greeted by the sight of his own coffin waiting for him at home. 32 years old at the time of the disaster Bob Richardson died 32 years later in 1935. He took ill on the Monday, the same day he was trapped in the pit, and remained in a coma until the Friday when he died, the same day he was rescued.



*Sacriston Colliery*



*The moment of Disaster. Flood water bursting into Jack Whittaker's workplace. He was killed but a young pit boy nearby ran for his life and beat the deadly tidal wave that chased after him.*



*The moment of rescue. Bob Richardson confused by the days of darkness first saw the lights of the rescue party reflected off the wet coalface and thought he was looking towards them, not facing the other way.*



*Daniel Defoe, a famous eye witness to the aftermath of a Chester-le-Street District mine disaster.*



Wooden shovel and mallet found at Lumley Sixth Pit, probably 17th century

*Remains of a wooden shovel and mallet, 17th Century wooden colliery tools, found underground near Lumley during modern mining operations.*



A hundred years ago the notion of a woman with a vote or a coal miner on the District Council would have seemed far fetched. Today nothing could be less remarkable, yet for centuries the governing of Chester-le-Street was a privilege which did not extend beyond a small and well-to-do section of the community. That was to change with the 20th century.

By tradition families such as the Woods of Chester-le-Street were the local governors. Wealthy and public spirited, they chaired local committees and any worthy cause was likely to benefit from their patronage. But ordinary people had a hankering to see to their own affairs, and were becoming a majority not inclined to be silent. In the wake of the Great War when the local electorate's choice was a Wood or a Pelton Fell coal hewer called Louis Parnell Martin, the hewer won hands down.

Louis Martin was one of the many would-be local governors ready and waiting in the wings. For years they had practised their skills on co-op committees and in the Miners' Union. They were known and they were trusted. They lived next door, not out of sight at the end of a mile long gravel drive. They owned a sackful of coal picks; they didn't own the local pit. As often as not they were men of great vision and slender finances. When other miners barely had the energy to wash themselves at the end of a hard shift they found the strength to walk to Council meetings and then walk back. They were men of high ideals who wanted to knock down the workhouse wall and build something better to replace it with.

Yet for all that, many a spellbinding orator couldn't tell you his collar size if his life depended on it, and making a decent pot of tea was usually one gift he sorely lacked. The womenfolk, the keepers of such mysteries, tended to be impressed by more concrete achievements than political prowess. One witty lady who wished half quarter of her husband's energies went into furnishing their home as went into local politics, heard the term "Minister without Portfolio", and christened her husband thereafter the "Councillor without three piece suite".

...WITHOUT  
THREE  
PIECE SUITE.

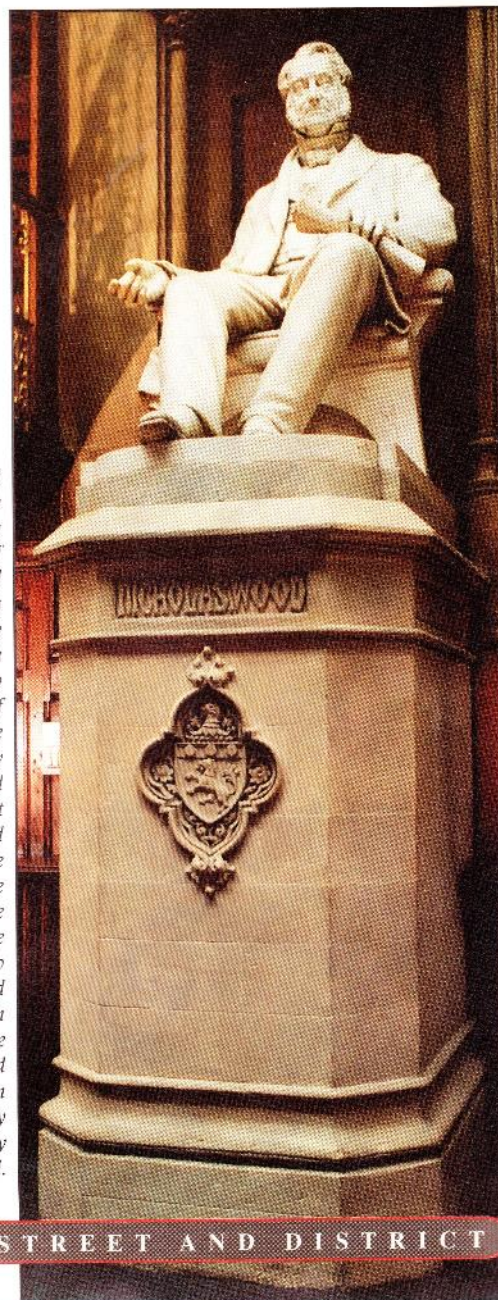


Louis Parnell Martin, standing, was a coal hewer at Pelton Fell Colliery and an Urban District Councillor. He won his council seat in a contest with the Wood family and when the results were announced his work mates chaired him down Chester-le-Street Front Street on their shoulders.



Louis Martin left behind no marble statues or stained glass windows to mark his passing, but there could be no finer memorial to him and his like than the model council cottages built to keep old Chester-le-Street folk out of the workhouse.

The Wood family were wealthy members of the coal owning classes. They saw it as a duty to help the poorest of the community and to fund projects that would improve the image of the District. The Woods were never slow to assist good causes when funds were lacking, and very often their charity was sorely needed.





# A COUNCIL HOUSE

...IN ALL ITS GLORY.

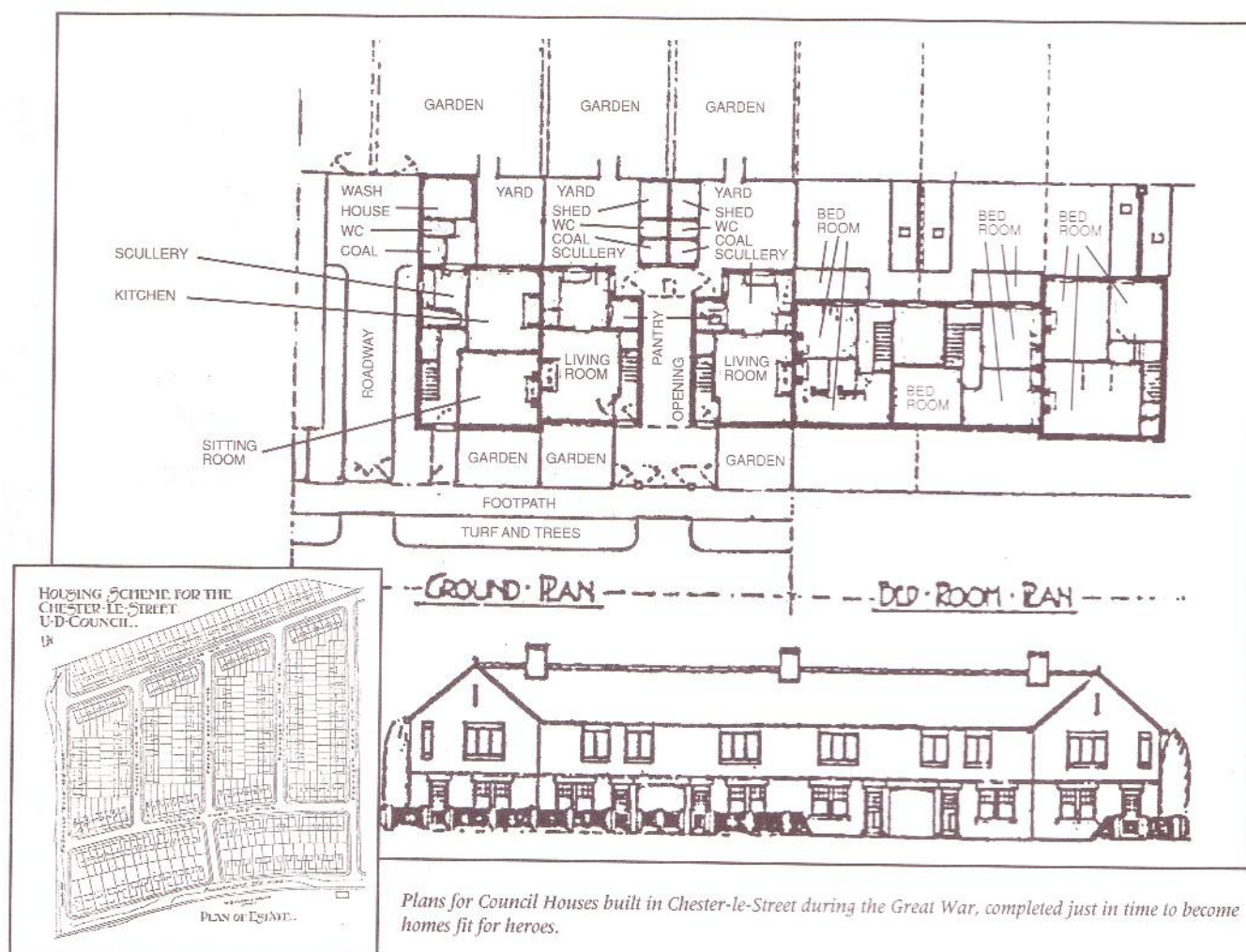
Chester-le-Street District's old Urban and Rural Councils had the distinction of being among the first social housing providers in England. Construction work was well underway across the district in the two or three years leading up to the Great War. Those very simple terraced Council Houses available to whoever needed them at a reasonable rent and no strings attached were a tremendous leap forward in their day.

Much of the community's existing housing stock then had a quaint 'Olde Worlde' look, with shuttered windows, rustic rubblestone walls and red pantile roofs, but they were often damp, unhealthy buildings lacking in basic amenities. Much of the local housing was also colliery owned. The new Council Housing broke that monopoly and provided an alternative to tied housing that came and went with the job, giving local people access to a better class of housing on far better terms.

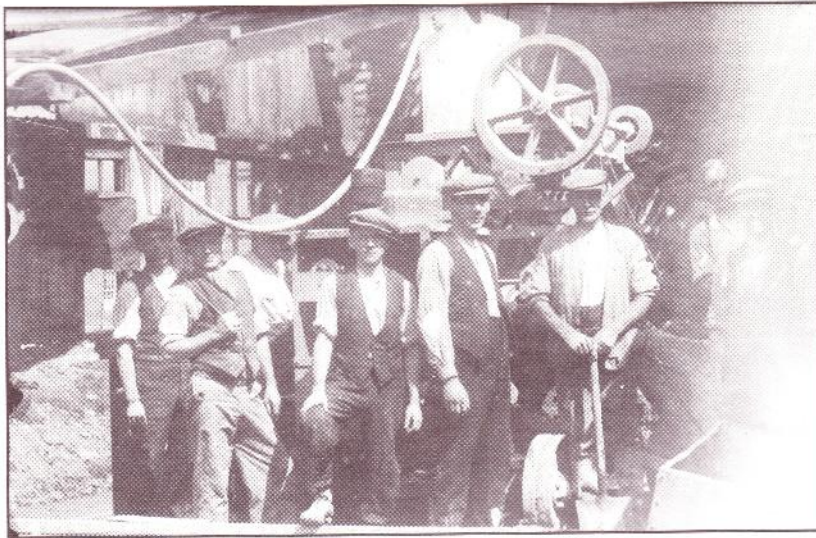
Those first Council Houses might not be that impressive by 1990's standards, yet the social improvements they represented were staggering.

You can get some idea of just how much these Council Houses once meant to the people of Chester-le-Street District by looking at the old Pelton Fell Colliery banner. Nowadays its faded silk is old and weak, and the once bright paintwork arthritic and reluctant to unfurl from its pole, yet the banner's picture still tells a powerful story.

A miner and his wife stand together. Behind them the dark clouds of oppression are fading, and with them the memory of squalid housing and dangerous pits. The spirit of liberty and progress smiles down on them both, and drawing back a dark curtain she reveals a Council House in all its glory.







*Danger Men at Work! Laying concrete at South Burns in 1930. By then the River Cone was an open sewer and cementing it in was one of many major Urban District Council projects to improve public health in the town.*



*The streets of Old Canada in the background were on their last legs by then and Chester-le-Street Council rehoused most of the families living there on the brand new Pelaw Estate. Not used to the plumbed in baths and the swift supply of red hot water in their new homes, lots of people had burned backsides that first week!*



*If this old postcard is anything to go by these little bungalows built by Chester-le-Street Rural District Council at Lumley must have been something to write home about.*



# HOPING TO SEE A PROFIT

As well as the major community housing projects of the Urban and Rural District Councils, a good many homes in the Chester-le-Street area have been built by private enterprise.

The handiwork of the old time 'Speculation Builders' can be seen all over the District. These small firms would build a few houses and sell a few to get the money to build a few more. It was a fine balancing act between profit and loss that didn't always come off.

Coronation Terrace in Chester-le-Street is a good example of a successful venture. Originally it was given the far less sober title of Klondyke Terrace. Built at the time of the Great Alaskan Gold Rush, that name fits the spirit in which these houses were built, by enterprising individuals staking a claim in Chester-le-Street's growth, and hoping to strike it rich.

Housing for the community in this century has always involved a relationship between the District Council and the private sector. Some of the first council houses were intended as private housing and bought from a near bankrupt builder whose gamble didn't quite pay off. As local Planning Authority too, the District Council has long regulated building work in the area and continues to do so.

Local family building firms such as Kells, Moles, and Thompsons contributed much to the Chester-le-Street townscape. In later years major private schemes were undertaken by larger regional and national building firms such as McCullochs and Leech in the 1960s, and Barratts and Wimpey in the 1980s and 1990s, although the tradition of local building by local people is still carried by firms such as McCarricks.

Today Chester-le-Street is still expanding and the District Council and private sector builders have been involved in a number of successful joint ventures. Some of the District's older council housing stock badly in need of thorough renovation and refurbishment has been disposed of in exchange for the upgrading and modernisation of the housing retained by the District Council.

## Garden Farm Estate

WEST LANE.

2-Bedroom Bungalows £2,550 with garage  
3-Bedroom Semi-Villas £2,900 with garage  
3 - 4 Bedroom Detached from £3,400 with garage.

## Queensmere Estate

NORTH ROAD.

Houses and Bungalows from £3,200 including garage, central heating and half tiling to kitchen and bathroom.

## Lumley Castle Estate

SCORER'S LANE.

Houses and Bungalows from £2,300



**S. McCULLOUGH LTD.**

46, HIGH WEST STREET, GATESHEAD 8.  
Telephone 73565.



you're laughing  
in a **LEECH** house

WILLIAM LEECH (Builders) LTD. 4 ST. JAMES STREET, NEWCASTLE  
Telephone : 29954

In 1963 two rival building firms, William Leech and S McCullough were advertising properties for sale on their new developments all over Chester-le-Street District.

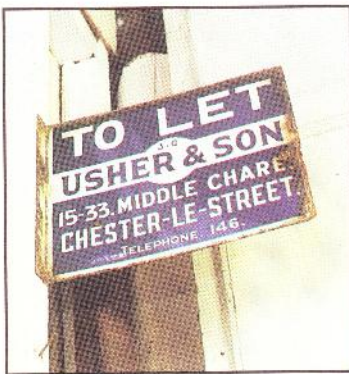




Edwardian housing shortage? A Chester-le-Street household in 1910.



Pre-War town Expansion. Moles the Builders' tradesmen outside a newly built house in Homelands Park.



An old enamel Estate Agents' sign from 1930s Chester-le-Street.



Above and below. In a successful joint venture with the private sector old Council Houses in Chester-le-Street District have been transformed beyond all recognition.





The history of the District and its people has many a proud moment and no shortage of quaint and cosy corners worth revisiting, but more than once hard times have had their part to play in the Chester-le-Street saga.

The infamous Waldrige Outrage of the 1830s was a black page in the District's history, when striking miners hurled pit tubs down the colliery shaft trapping underground those men who wished no part in the strike.

An even blacker page was written at Pelton when mine owners in dispute with their workmen ordered one of the most heartless evictions in British industrial history. At the height of a cholera epidemic miners and their families were put out of cottages where they lay in the grip of the disease. Many of them too weak to make the short walk into Chester-le-Street for help crawled under the hedgerows of Pelton Lane for shelter and died there.

The 20th Century has seen hard times too, conflicts that have sorely put the character of the community to the test.

During the General Strike of 1926 Chester-le-Street miners who kept on working were beaten up, their families intimidated and treated as outcasts. Rocks were thrown through their windows. Boulders were rolled onto unlit roads to waylay any traffic moving through the District at night.

In what were normally close knit communities, being "tin panned" down the back lane by jeering women, bashing saucepans together, was worse than facing the unforgiving clatter of German heavy machine gun fire.

For Chester-le-Street "Blacklegs" the "No Man's Land" between the pit and home was a dangerous place to be caught.

Outside the old Urban District Council Offices during the 1926 Strike a lorry deliberately drove at full speed into a picket line barring the Front Street, killing one of pickets.

Violence was close to being the order of the day. One old District Councillor used to rub his chin thoughtfully when talking of the General Strike, his jaw still marked with the scar left by a police truncheon blow.

At Ouston a police squad was showered with bricks and bottles and the Police Superintendent reading the Riot Act was struck down in mid sentence by a pick shaft blow. There were several brutal baton charges by the Police in the Chester-le-Street District, rivalling in savagery the response to civil disturbances a hundred years before.

Yet there were policemen who cared little for the brutality of the Riot Squads. There were mine owners who gave their coal away to families that needed it and there were miners who turned their powerful hands to making pails of soup for needy neighbours, not to throttling the local constabulary.

*Pit village "Bobby" Jack Ward's sympathies lay more with the mining community than with the police riot squad. He did his best to pick up the pieces when those squads marched away after the 1926 strike, leaving him behind at West Pelton, a one man village police force among hundreds of miners.*







*Co-operation in time of conflict. At Sacriston during the General Strike of 1926 the coal company and the miners' union operated a drift together. Permission to mine the coal for local families in need was given by the mine owners along with timber, plate, rails and tubs. The union organised the workforce to win the coal, a rare truce in a bitter industrial conflict.*



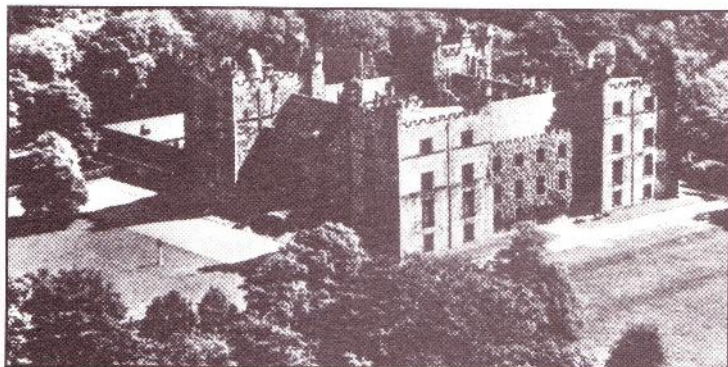
*Hard Times Nil, Community Spirit Three. Pelton Fell people versus the General Strike. The Soup Kitchen Team ready for the kick off.*



*Fighting long term unemployment. During the Depression these Chester-le-Street men clubbed together and kept their wits sharp with football, joinery and amateur dramatics.*



# WAR AND PEACE

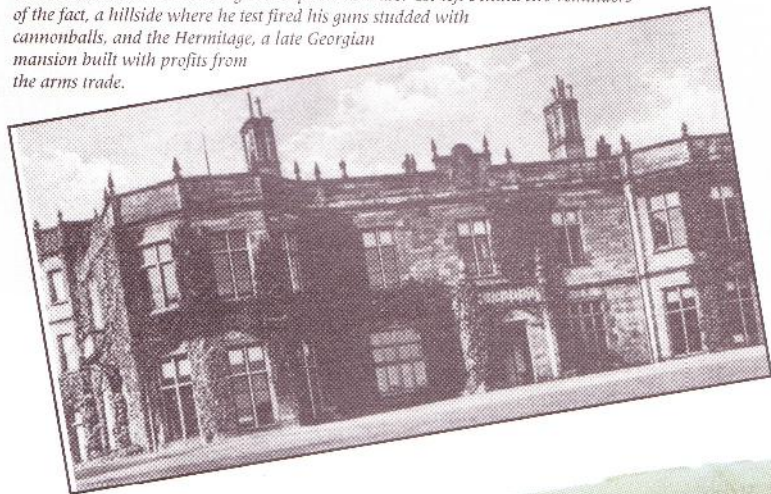


(Above) War and Peace under one roof. Lumley Castle, a well known landmark of the Chester-le-Street District, has some built in peacetime features but was still fortified enough if ever war should rise again.

(Right) Rock of Ages. The cracked and weather beaten stonework of this 14th Century grave cover once marked the last resting place of a prosperous Chester-le-Street resident. It carries the sword and the ploughshare, ancient symbols of War and Peace. Like this old stone, Chester-le-Street's history has been deeply marked by both. The people have known peace with plenty and peace without it, the ravages of war and the fortunes made from it.



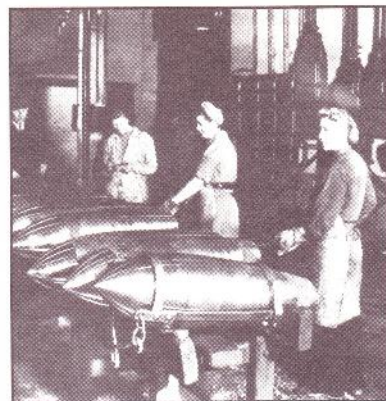
(Below) Great Guns! Nathaniel Cookson of Chester-le-Street made a fortune selling armaments to the British Government during the Napoleonic Wars. He left behind two reminders of the fact, a hillside where he test fired his guns studded with cannonballs, and the Hermitage, a late Georgian mansion built with profits from the arms trade.







*Sweet Success. Dainty Dinah Toffee, Chester-le-Street's most famous product.*



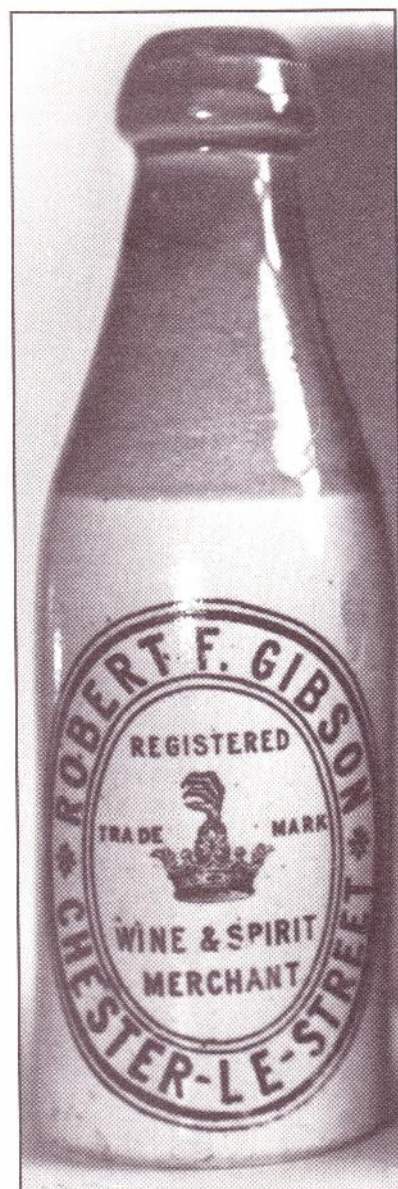
*Making a Bomb! Many Chester-le-Street women worked in the munitions factories at Birtley and Newton Aycliffe during World War II.*

**Dainty Dinah TOFFEE.**

If only you could see the happy expression on the face of your soldier lad when he comes back from the muddy trenches to his billet, and finds a parcel from "Blighty" awaiting him! It helps him to forget what he has been through—the great trials and sufferings he has undergone. He will be better pleased still if he finds a supply of Dainty Dinah Toffee in that parcel—for he loves it, and so do his pals. He knows a good thing, and he knows that Dainty Dinah Toffee is good, gloriously good.

Send him some next time you are making up a parcel—he's sure to enjoy it and want more.

—  
SOLD BY ALL GOOD CONFECTIONERS.  
—  
GEORGE W. HORNER & Co., Ltd.,  
Makers of Good Confectionery.  
CHESTER-LE-STREET, County of Durham.



*Chester Bitter. Chester-le-Street was once famous for the strong ale brewed in the District.*

*Bullets for the Troops. Even Dainty Dinah went to war.*





One of the Great War dead. Bob Little was so fast with a pit pony and coal tub that his workmates called him "the Slush Putter". He actually joined the army in the colliery yard of the Alma Pit at Grange Villa, stepping out of the cage into daylight and the arms of the Recruiting Sergeant. Bob Little went to France with the Durham Light Infantry and never came home, dying of his wounds in a French hospital bed.

Miner's safety lamp token and union membership badge from Chester-le-Street District.



Great War Widow and Orphan. Mrs Fuller and her son Joe.



Old Sweats and New Recruits. Chester-le-Street District's Volunteer Light Infantry Company before the Great War.



Felton Fell pitmen on their "hunkers". Miners who spent their working lives in low coal seams felt comfortable crouching. Even out of the pit it was once a common sight in the District to see men at bus stops or wherever doubled up like this.



## CHESTER LADS FOR EVER.

THO' Durham County, fam'd of old,  
Thro' England, be it ever told,  
Thou Chester lads stood forth so bold,  
And Chester lads for ever.

When Frenchmen heard of their intent,  
To Bonaparte in haste they sent,  
And said, since Chester thus is bent,  
We are ruin'd, sirs, for ever.

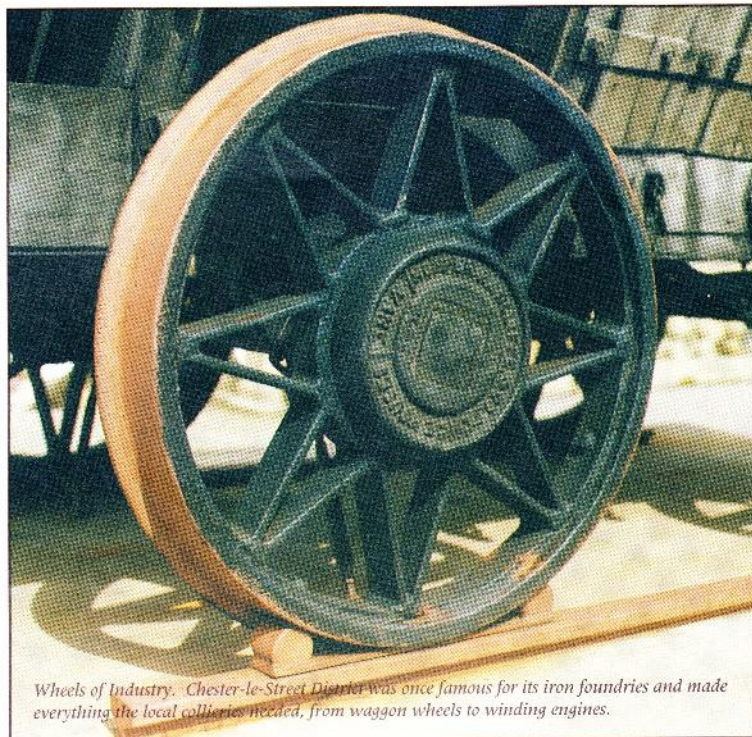
O dreadful news! said Bonaparte,  
Enough to break each Frenchman's heart;  
But let us try, with all our art,  
Those Chester lads to sever.

Then firmly spoke Monsieur Otto,  
The Chester lads you little know,  
If them you think to overthrow;  
For they will fight for ever.

Tho' many millions you have slain,  
Yet what you've done is all in vain;  
You'll never beat the Chester men,  
Nor cope with them—no never.

The Consul call'd a council straight,  
And long and learned the debate;  
Each Frenchman tried, with all his weight,  
How France he might deliver.

The issue of this parliament  
Was peace—the glorious grand event,  
Which gave each British heart content,  
And Chester lads for ever!!!



*Wheels of Industry. Chester-le-Street District was once famous for its iron foundries and made everything the local collieries needed, from waggon wheels to winding engines.*



*Where there's muck there's brass. The pit head at Chester Moor Colliery and town bandmen.*



*Babes in Arms. Chester-le-Street boy bandmen photographed in Church Chare.*



Kriegsgefangenenpost  
Postkarte  
Reprint 26

MISS G. WILKIN THE GARDEN

Gebührenfrei

Abseher: JACK COLLINS

Vor- und Zuname: JACK COLLINS

Gefangenennummer: 5948

Lager-Bezeichnung: ENGLAND

Deutschland (Allemand)

*Postcard sent home by P.O.W Jack Collins*

## Chester-le-Street Welcome Home Fund.

Council Chambers,  
Chester-le-Street,  
1st March, 1946.

The Committee responsible for organising the above Fund recently decided that the time had arrived when the effort should be ended and the Fund closed. The Organisers regret the sum raised (£2,355) is less than was expected, and consequently does not permit them to do what they had at first intended, viz: to present all members of the Forces and Merchant Navy normally resident in the Urban District of Chester-le-Street, estimated at 1,500, with both a cash gift and a suitable memento. The amount, therefore, to be allocated is 30/- each, and a cheque for this amount is enclosed.

In forwarding this cheque the members of the Committee wish it to be understood that it in no way represents their own personal feelings of gratitude for all the sacrifices made by those in the Forces during the last six years. They would have preferred a much greater practical tribute to have been paid to the men and women of the town who have given some of the best years of their lives in the recent struggle, but unfortunately the response to the appeal will not allow this.

It is realised that not all to whom this note is addressed have been fortunate to return, but have made the supreme sacrifice. In such instances the Committee desire the next of kin to accept their sincere sympathy in the loss they have sustained in so great a cause and as the cheque is made out in the name of the deceased would the next of kin kindly call upon the Treasurer at Martins Bank, or the Secretary at the Council Chambers with Official evidence, when it will be amended.

SAM USHER, J.P. (Chairman).  
J. T. CARTER (Ex-Chairman).  
S. SURTEES (Hon. Treasurer).  
THOS. D. OIBBS (Hon. Secretary).





(Above) "Chester Lads Forever!" was their battle cry. A wooden memorial cross brought back to Chester-le-Street from the Somme Battlefield just after the Great War. It marked the ground where on Guy Fawkes Night 1916 Chester-le-Street's band of volunteer riflemen disappeared into the mud forever.

(Left) Trying to grin and bear it. Prisoner of War snapshot sent home to Chester-le-Street from Poland during World War II by Jack Collins, captured by the Germans in 1940.



In a German mining district wrecked and battered by years of bombing the last day of the war in Europe finally dawned. The fighting had finished, khaki clad British Tommies in Bren Gun Carriers rattled through what was left of the town with hardly a second look at what they had won.

On the rubble strewn outskirts an abandoned anti aircraft gun still pointed skyward. Excited children who had known nothing else but war played a realistic gun crew game as though the role of flak artillerymen was second nature.

It was a bitter time for the community. Civilian losses in the air raids had been high. Good friends and family members sent to the Russian Front had never been seen or heard from since. Old comrades from the miners' union had disappeared into the concentration camps, and who knew what was still to come? At least it was the "Tommies" and not the Red Army rumbling through the district.

It was then the most fearful sound of all was heard, the engines of a line British bomber, a pathfinder that told of a thousand more to come. It flew in fast and thunderous, gigantic looking at such a low level.

The doors in its belly hung wide open. Out of them flew the unexpected, a shower of snow in summer, not marker flares but a million leaflets falling and fluttering groundwards, then the bomber was gone like a bad dream.

For the children catching hold of them it was more fun than playing soldiers, and the big gun was forgotten. A man in pit boots bent and picked a leaflet up. Sketched on it was a coal miner just like himself and his 'marra', and in German script a greeting from the miners of County Durham and their families to the miners of Germany and their families.

However far the distance and great the national differences, mining communities have much in common. They are natural twins separated by birth and the urge not to stay apart is a strong one. The surprise delivery that day by air mail was well received and a seed was planted from which the international twinning movement grew, a movement in which Chester-le-Street District has been more than pleased to play its part.

*Leaflets dropped on German mining communities by the RAF at the end of World War II, carrying greetings from the miners of County Durham and their families to the miners of Germany and their families.*



Botschaft der Bergleute von Durham in England:

## An alle Bergleute Europas!

Wir, die Mitglieder des Bergarbeiterverbandes von Durham, freie Männer in einem freien Lande, grüssen Euch.

Fast allein in ganz Europa haben wir heute das Recht, uns frei zusammenzuschliessen, frei öffentliche Versammlungen abzuhalten und frei zu reden. Mehr denn je sind wir heute fest entschlossen, uns diese Erbschaft unangetastet zu erhalten. Und wir wollen, dass Ihr alle dieselben Rechte haben sollt, wie wir.

Dafür kämpfen alle Bergleute, vor allem wir Bergleute von Durham, die wir in einem freien, demokratischen Lande leben und die demokratische Freiheit höher stellen als unser eigenes Leben.

In diesem Kampf, den England und seine Verbundenen kämpfen, haben wir Bergleute uns voll eingesetzt; und dabei bleibt es. Wir wissen,

### An alle Bergleute Europas

dass der Endtag der Nazis das Licht der Freiheit für alle Zeiten ausstrahlen wird. Ihr Triumph würde das Ende der freien Gewerkschaftsbewegung sein. Ihr selber seid Zeugen der Richtigkeit dieser Erkenntnis. Aber Schicksal, Eure Knechtung durch alle grossprecherischen Verdrängungen der Goebbelspropaganda Lügen.

In der felsenfesten Überzeugung, dass das Ende der Nazibanden nahe ist, senden wir Euch heute aus jedem Bergmannsdorf, aus jedem Bergmannsdorf in Durham und in ganz England unsere herzlichsten Grüsse. Ketzt es was es wolle, wir werden kein Opfer scheuen und alles voller Zuversicht ertragen: denn wir wissen, dass nur das Ende der Nazis der Menschheit neue Hoffnung geben kann.

Wir wissen, man versucht Euch einzureden, dass England nicht mehr lange durchhalten kann. Die Entwicklung der letzten sechs Monate, die Ereignisse jedes einzelnen Tages beweisen, dass dem nicht so ist. Nie werden die barbarischen Räuber, die Euch heute knechten, unser Volk unterkriegen, dessen Geschichte ein einziger zäher und siegreicher Kampf um die Freiheit ist.

In diesem Kampf um die Freiheit standen wir Bergleute von Durham stets in vorderster Front. Stets waren wir die Ersten, wenn es galt, die Wehrkräften anderer Länder zu stärken und zu stützen. Heute rufen wir Euch zu: Ihr habt unser Wort und Ihr könnt darauf bauen: die Bergleute von Durham, die keine Todesfahr scheuen, wenn es sich darum handelt, Genossen zu retten, haben noch niemals ihr Wort gebrochen. Heute mag Euch die Zukunft noch schwarz erscheinen; aber wir sagen Euch das Licht des unversinkenden Wegs erhellt und uns Zuversicht gibt, muss auch Euch Mut und Vertrauen geben, Knechtung, Grausamkeit und Tyrannei zu stürzen.

Wir Bergleute von Durham und unsere Frauen senden Euch diese Botschaft der Hoffnung:

Jeder Faschismus wird gestürzt; und auf den Bannern der Bergleute Europas wird wieder die Lösung stehen: internationale Freundschaft und Solidarität!

Vertraut auf unsere gute Sache, vertraut auf unseren sicheren Sieg! Durch unsere Hände werden die Arbeiter-schlechter Europas fallen!



Emblem of Kamp-Lintfort, the German Community twinned with Chester-le-Street. In German the word "Kamp" shows a community has Roman origins, and the crossed hammer-like picks on the shield, the old hand tools of the brown coal pitmen, shows that Kamp-Lintfort has a mining tradition also.

KAMERADSCHAFT.  
CHESTER-LE-STREET  
TWINNED WITH  
KAMP-LINTFORT.



# HAVING A GOOD TIME

...AT CHESTER-LE-STREET.

A bit of fun and giving yourself a treat has always been high on the Chester-le-Street agenda. Indoors or out of them, the town and its surrounding countryside have long hosted the community's leisure activities.

Dining out in Chester-le-Street has come a long way since the 9th century when all a weary band of monks could find to eat at the end of their journey with the relics of St Cuthbert was the salted head of a horse!

Nowadays, just a stone's throw from where they laid down their holy burden, you can treat yourself to Shropshire Pea Soup, Sherried Pork with Figs, and a fairly sinful dessert for afters.

Ancient chroniclers do not record any saintly links with the tradition of ale drinking in Chester-le-Street, although the monks must have been sorely in need of a strong tasting local brew to wash down their horse's head with.

Certainly the Dun Cow was part of the ancient legend of St Cuthbert, the beast seen in a Holy Man's dream that would guide the monks to the Saint's last resting place. The sign of the Dun Cow Inn at the bottom on Chester-le-Street's Front Street guided passers-by to the most unholy spot in the entire District.

Its tap room looms large in the drinking folk lore of Chester-le-Street and is still remembered as the last resting place of many a pitman's wages. It was renowned for its roaring coal fire of fender-buckling fierceness and for its even fiercer women who could drink any man under the table - and often did. Like many a one of its customers of old, the Dun Cow has bitten the sawdust and disappeared into oblivion.

Today the workmen's clubs and public houses of the town are a bit more civilised. They attract large crowds towards the weekends and of an evening the Front Street grows busy with people from all over the District having a night out.

The glitter of the Empire Ball Room and the wood panelled foyers of the town cinemas are no more. The chances to dress up as an Indian chief or a mermaid and parade through the streets of the town on a carnival float are certainly not what they used to be, but the opportunity for enjoyment and the inclination to do so are no less than they ever were.

The solitary fisherman still stands up to his thighs in the Wear. The courting couple make their way down Lovers' Walk. The family outing heads for Riverside Park, all pop bottles, carrier bags and kids, just as they have done for generations.

Private individuals and groups have organised their own activities or provided them for others and still do, but community leisure is an area in which the District Council and its forebears have made their contribution. As well as being responsible for such early milestones of civilisation as sewage systems, pavements and street lighting, the old councils always had an eye for the finer things of life, such as flower beds, park benches, bandstands and bowling greens.

These inclinations have been updated with public baths, indoor leisure centres and outdoor recreational facilities. With substantial further developments afoot, it doesn't seem that having a good time in Chester-le-Street is in any danger of becoming a thing of the past.



Out for a Duck! Lambton Park shooting party at the turn of the century.

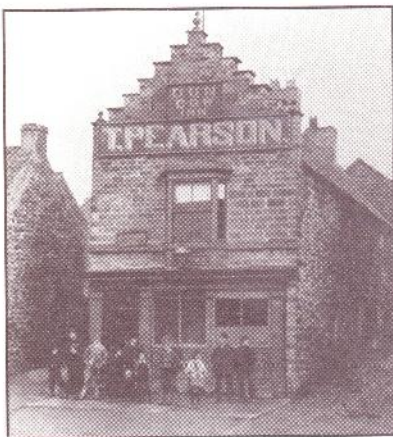
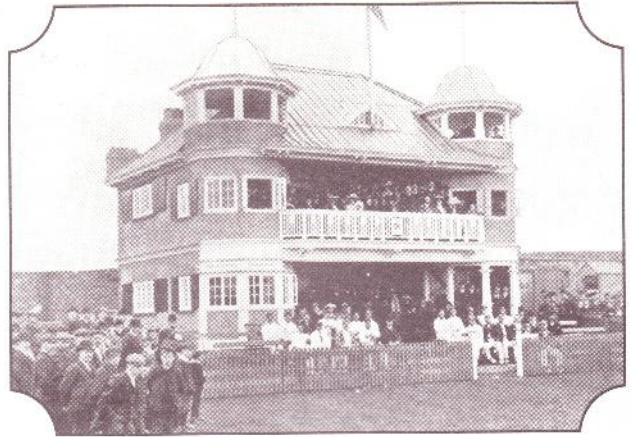


144 Years Not Out! Cricket in Chester-le-Street District is a popular tradition that still enjoys a strong following. Rough and ready tactics played on a weed clogged pitch in the 1840s gave the Chester-le-Street side a name as fearsome as their reputation as "The Burnside Dockens Slashers". The planned Riverside Development at Chester-le-Street will be home to the County Cricket Team, and the first class sporting venue proposed will guarantee a future for one old Chester-le-Street tradition when so many others have disappeared.

However, the local traditions of losing the ball among the dock leaves to improve your score, and using extra wide bats, will not be allowed!



Men and Women's Cricket Teams. Perhaps the development of a strong women's section was hastened by the suffragette bomb planted in Chester-le-Street Cricket Pavilion.



The Old Dun Cow Inn, Chester-le-Street, before the turn of the century.

Watch the Birdie!  
Chester-le-Street golfers old and new pose for the camera at Chester-le-Street Golf Club in the 1950s and on the municipal course at Roseberry Grange in the 1990s.





# GOING DOWN THE STREET

The old comic song 'Nanny's a Maisor' printed in Chester-le-Street in the 1930s recalls the misadventures of a coal miner and his wife on a shopping expedition to Newcastle. 'Going to the town' for the occasional spending spree is an old North Durham shopping tradition. For just as long the people of Chester-le-Street District have turned to their own town, the town of Chester-le-Street, to meet their everyday shopping needs and they still do.

On market days and Saturday mornings in particular you'll see bus queues of shoppers in the surrounding villages making for Chester-le-Street, and although there're plenty of car parks around business is so brisk they soon get pretty full.

'Going down the Street', the local term for going shopping is one old custom that has lived long and prospered.

In times past the miner and his wife would come to town. For the man it was a walk up to Archibald's shop and a look through the barrel of coal hewers' pick shafts that stood outside on the path. It was important to pick out a good one, with no warp or knots and a close, straight grain to it. For the miner's wife it was into the Co-op for the family groceries that would be wrapped up in one of their famous brown paper parcels and delivered straight to the door.

A lot of the old shopping emporiums, with enough lino to deck out the Queen Mary and a selection of boots that would have kitted out the whole Durham Light Infantry, have disappeared. Archibald's and the Co-op however are still going strong. They've changed with the times and meet the more sophisticated needs of the 1990s. There's a lot nowadays that's pre-packed, bar coded and computer controlled, but there's still good old fashioned quality to be found too.

Hand made prize winning sausage and gold medal pastries are still produced in Chester-le-Street and sold there.

Obviously Chester-le-Street people shop elsewhere too, but Chester-le-Street tends to be their first port of call. You have to pass through the town or go into it for something or other. Parking's handy and shopping ties in nicely with popping to the Post Office, the bank or building society, or wherever.



*A Chester-le-Street cake shop and cafe of yesteryear. The large number of these still in business today, providing a meeting place, rest and refreshment to weary shoppers, hints at Chester-le-Street holding on to its traditional role as shopping centre for people of the District.*





Established 1864.

**DIXON**

Pastrycook  
and Confectioner

Front Street, Chester-le-Street

All Goods of Best Quality.

BRIDESCAKES a Speciality.

**Gifts**

for all  
occasions



**Rogerson & Atkinson**

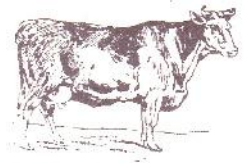
Ltd.

The Jewellers,

CENTRAL BUILDINGS,  
CHESTER-LE-STREET.



Phone: 2308. Established over 100 years.



**J. Y. Robson & Son**

COUNTY FAMILY BUTCHERS,  
CHESTER-LE-STREET

Purveyors of Super-Grade Meat as supplied  
by us to all the leading houses in the district.

We specialise in **GOOD SAUSAGES.**

P.S.—FRESH MEAT. Our Frigidaire  
will keep your joint perfectly fresh until  
you want it, during warm weather.



Provisions in Plenty. Old Walter Willsons on Chester-le-Street Front Street had a butter mountain long before the Common Market was even thought of. (Above) 1930s small ads trying to catch the eye of would-be buyers.



Cash outs and Car boots. Chester-le-Street has adapted in a big way to the modern day wants and methods of shops and shoppers.



# THE TIES OF TOWN & DISTRICT

Wild once-a-year traditional events and strange folk tales might add a bit of spice to the locality, but they aren't the mainstays of what makes Chester-le-Street District and its community distinct from anywhere else.

That difference has as much to do with the everyday and the ordinary as the occasional and the peculiar. It's the kind of features communities have in common that often distinguish one from another.

A newly released Chester-le-Street Prisoner of War coming home by train in 1945 passed a thousand railway platforms, a thousand factory chimneys and a thousand church spires on his long delayed return journey. Yet what overwhelmed him was stepping down onto Chester-le-Street ground, seeing Horner's Toffee Factory Chimney and the Spire of St Cuthbert and St Mary's Church. They told him he was home, he was safe and the ordeal was really over. The thousands of other railway platforms, chimneys and church spires didn't carry that same message.

The closure of Chester-le-Street District's coal mines in the 1960s also showed how strong an influence local ties could be on whole groups of people. To London based coal board chiefs it seemed a simple solution to move the local workforce a few inches to the east on their big map and relocate it in the coastal collieries.

It was a sensible looking strategy, but it rode roughshod over tribal boundaries. Set down in nearby but nevertheless strange pits, with strange people, a strange dialect and different ways, Chester-le-Street's miners got the message that they weren't at home, or anywhere like it, and many preferred to leave the industry because of that.

Most communities have their own particular version of everyday life that means something to them, but that meaning is intensified in the likes of Chester-le-Street, where a long history and distinct geography have conspired to produce such a strong district flavour.

The jig-saw of landmarks, events, personalities and institutions that is Chester-le-Street has built up into the very image of a community with the deepest felt sense of local identity.

*As a grand old District institution Chester-le-Street's Co-operative and Industrial Society takes the biscuit. With its headquarters in the town and branches in most surrounding villages it was one of a number of important local organisations that helped turn Chester-le-Street into a District.*



*The ties of Town and District. Chester-le-Street's institutions may not be entirely unique but the one place they represent, the particular people they have been drawn from and the individual histories they possess have created a strong local identity, and with it a feeling of being set apart from other Districts and their rival institutions.*





CHESTER-LE-STREET DISTRICT COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO  
ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS FOR ALLOWING THE  
REPRODUCTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN  
'CHESTER-LE-STREET AND DISTRICT - THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACE'.

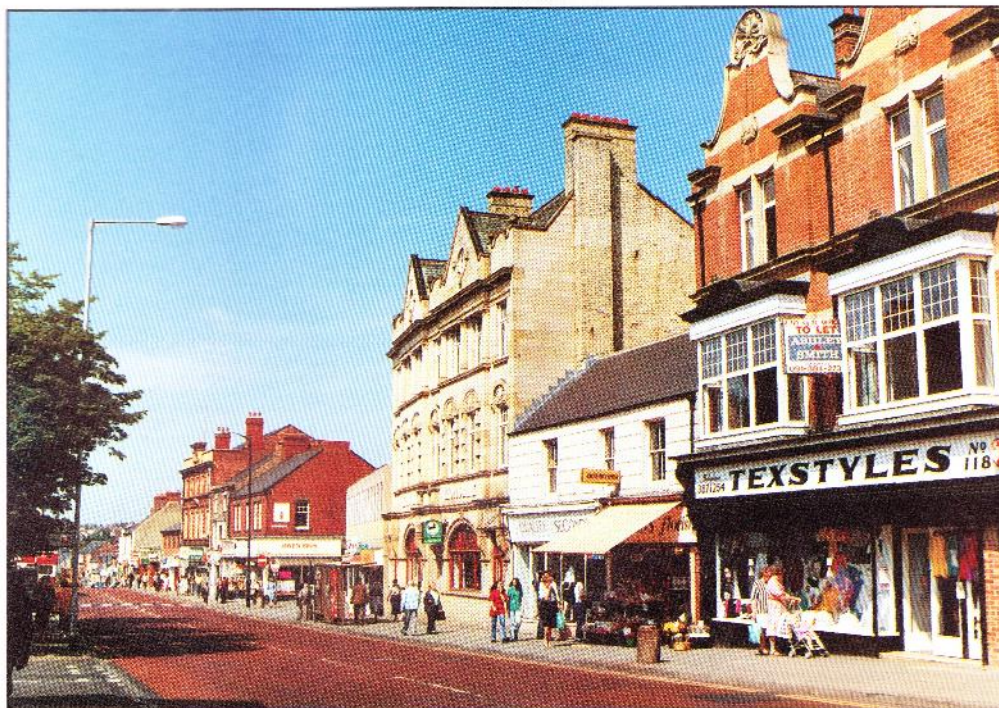
Especial thanks are due to Mr George Nairn for  
allowing us access to his comprehensive collection of  
photographs and memorabilia, and of course to Mr  
Gavin Purdon, author of this history.

Also to:

The Museum of Antiquities of the University and  
Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne  
Mr Jack Atkinson  
Beamish - The North of England Open Air Museum  
A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd  
The British Library  
Mr Frank Bush  
Mr Jack Collins  
The Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College,  
Cambridge  
The Dorman Museum, Middlesbrough  
The Dean and Chapter Library, The College, Durham  
Fleet Air Arm  
Mr J Gardiner  
Mrs Dorothy Hall  
Mr and Mrs Linton  
Mrs Martin  
Mr D Harker  
The Royal Mail  
Mr R Stainbank  
Tyne and Wear Museums



## CHESTER-LE-STREET LOOKING NORTH PAST AND PRESENT





As this 16th century etching by Christopher Saxton shows, Chester-le-Street District has been on the map a long time.

